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PERMANENTLY TEMPORARY: ROMA REFUGEE YOUTH SEEKING SCHOOLING

by
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the experiences of education in exile from a small case study of Roma refugee male youths from Kosovo temporarily settled in Macedonia as ‘asylum seekers.’ These refugees are at an overlooked age where they have slipped through the cracks between the post-war, short-term relief and longer-term development efforts in terms of education. Many of the frustrations of this community stem from their difficulties in accessing education, and their uncertain legal limbo or ‘permanently temporary’ situations.

As adolescents, refugees, and Roma, the youth are at a triple jeopardy of marginalization and invisibility. Through conversations with four Roma refugee youth and their extended families, this study chronicles the obstacles they are encountering while trying to access education, their attitudes towards schooling, and the role and the importance of education in refugees’ lives by providing stability, agency, and an invaluable investment for the future. The study also discusses the critical role that schooling plays in the psychosocial well-being of refugees. Other emerging themes include multilingualism as means of portable capital and preparation for the future, and strong family bonds as a source of healing from the traumatic effects of war. The study concludes with insights into what refugees need in order to pursue schooling.

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INTRODUCTION

In August 2006, I spent three weeks in the town of Šutka, Macedonia, living with and interviewing Roki, Toni, Meori, Edri, and their extended family members, the Kurteshis and the Azemins, all members of a Roma refugee community from Kosovo with barriers to education who have been in political limbo since 1999. This thesis chronicles their stories.

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the educational experiences and attitudes of male Roma refugee youth from Kosovo through a qualitative study. It explored the difficulties they face in accessing schooling in their host country of Macedonia, investigated how they understand themselves and their education in a long-term refugee situation, and analyzed the role they envision education playing in their futures.

Roma refugee youth are a marginalized, invisible population who drop out of school at high rates (Bedard, et. al., 2005). That this study is looking at the refugee experience with respect to education is important because education is vital to their psychosocial well-being and is a source of portable, transferable capital (Mosselson, 2006). The notion of portable capital is especially important to refugee youth. They have learned that their lives can be uprooted and material possessions lost, but once attained, education is seen as a permanent asset that brings hope and possibility for the future. In long-term refugee crises or refugee situations, “education can be a critical part of providing meaning in life” (Nicolai, 2002, p.10). Studies show refugee youth to be motivated students (Jones & Rutter, 1998) who generally believe education is key to future advancement (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Traumatic effects of war

can have horrifying effects on youth, but can also work to make them more resilient, with the potential to excel in school (Sommers, 2002).

This research is especially important because it gives voice to youth, members of a group invisible even in a refugee setting. These youth are members of not one, but three, invisible populations. They are invisible because they are adolescents (Lowicki, 1999), because they are Roma (Abdikeeva, 2005), and because they are refugees. Each of these is a marginalized group usually associated with passive and/or negative stereotypes. They have the experiences of acculturation any immigrant undergoes; however, these are compounded by the traumatic experiences of war and being labeled as refugees, which refugees often find stigmatizing (Mosselson, 2006).

Although motivated when given access, there is a high drop out rate among refugee students often due to lack of opportunities (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995); this can lead to disillusionment. Also, the drop out rate among Roma youth in Macedonia is the highest in the country, with large numbers leaving school after only the fifth grade (Bedard, et. al., 2005). This study provides insight for the international community into why this may be happening, and more importantly, provides insight into what may be done. Investigating Roma refugee attitudes towards education and their needs for continuing their studies will help to provide insight into what refugees need to pursue schooling.

In order to investigate the educational needs of Roma refugee youth, I explored the following questions in my research:

What are the attitudes of teenage Kosovar Roma refugees towards education? What does education mean to them?

a. What cultural adjustments do they have to make in order to experience school in Macedonia?

b. How do they understand themselves in a long-term refugee situation?

What role does “refugee” play in their identities? How do they reconcile the label of “refugee” with education? Are they concerned about education?

c. How do they envision their futures? What role do they see education playing in their futures?

CHAPTER ONE. METHODOLOGY

This is a case study of male Roma refugee youth, which relied primarily on ethnographic methods and participant observation. It was conducted in Šutka, Macedonia, where the refugees currently live, over a three week period in August 2006.

Ethnographic methods

Barker cites ethnographies as being essentially a “qualitative understanding of cultural activity in context” (Barker, 2005, p.26) which should not be regarded as the collecting of facts in a scientific manner, or a search for an absolute truth because data presented as such are likely to be colored with hegemonic and unexamined worldviews. Rather ethnography can be considered as “giving poetic expression to voices from other cultures” and a “conversation between participants in a research process” (Barker, 2005, p.26). Barker states that the purposes of both ethnographies and novels:

do not lie in the production of a ‘true’ picture of the world but in the production of empathy and the widening of the circle of human solidarity... [They] offer the possibility of an improvement of the human condition (Barker, 2005, p.27).

All research, including ethnographic research, is an interpretation made by the researcher rather than an objective painting of cultural reality. Therefore, it is important to me to explore certain questions regarding my “assumptions, views and positions” (Barker, 2005, p.26). What is my relationship with my participants? What is my interpretive lens? I came into the interviews already having some amount of empathy for my participants because I had a prior, although superficial, relationship with them. My being a woman, graduate student, American, anglophone, white, and my age and social status, among other characteristics and personal background doubtless influenced both my interpretation and my relationship with the participants.

This study calls for qualitative research due to its participative nature and the possibility of “digging deep” to examine data from “various angles to construct a rich and meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p.147). Qualitative research can reveal the nature of relationships, people, or situations, as well as provide insights and new perspectives into the nature of a particular phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Participant observation, in which the researcher directly experiences the social world and daily life of the participants for an extended period of time, allowed me to immerse myself in the setting of the Roma refugee youth and “to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants do” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.106).

In-depth interviews were the primary method of gathering data because they seek to “capture the deep meaning of experience in their own words” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 61) and are therefore appropriate for a study focusing on an individual lived experience, such as this one. The purpose of this study is to describe and uncover the participant’s views and experiences, so the “participative view is what matters” (p.110).

The interviews were semi-structured because, while I did have core issues and a list of questions I wanted to cover, I also wanted to allow the conversation to be open ended when need be. Both interviewer and participants had the freedom to guide the conversation in any direction in order to accommodate the latter’s experiences and stories and give them more voice. The core issues covered in the semi-structured interviews included: attitudes and experiences about schooling, languages, hobbies and interests, memories of and connections to Kosovo, future aspirations, refugee status, experiences with UNHCR, and relationships with family and community.

My original selection criteria for the interviews were adolescents, Roma, and refugees with barriers to education. I gained access to the Roma refugee community in Šutka (pronounced ‘shootka’) while working for a small NGO in Kosovo in 2003. I came to Šutka several times with a Roma colleague who introduced me to the community. I then stayed in touch by email with several of the English speaking youth. In August 2006, I spent three weeks with one of the refugee families I had met in 2003. The family refused pay for room and board. In exchange for their kindness, room and board, dance lessons, and their help finding interview participants, we came to an agreement. I helped the interested teenagers navigate the local education system (to the best of my ability), called embassies and inquired about the immigration process for them, promised to tell their stories in my writing, and provided daily English (and occasional Spanish) lessons. The family used this time to learn as much English as possible as they have hopes of emigrating.

Triangulation of data

Data were gathered in a variety of ways: participant observation, interviews via email and online chats, and in-person interviews and focus groups with both the core group of youth and their family members in order to provide context and to provide alternative perspectives on the youths’ lives. The email/chat interviews took place during the spring of 2006 (for another study) and the spring of 2007. The in-person interviews and observation occurred over a three-week period in August 2006 in Šutka, Macedonia.

Sampling

The interview participants were four Roma refugee male youth and ten family and community members. They included parents (2), uncles (3), cousins and siblings (4), and

a community leader (1). I had between one and four interviews with each person. The four youth were Roki, Toni, Edri and Meori¹.

Table 1. Interview participants

participant	Age in Aug 06	Relationship to youth	Email interviews	In-person interviews in Šutka August 2006
Roki	18	n/a	spring 06 & 07	4 (2 private, 2 with others chiming in)
Toni	18	n/a	spring 2007	2 (with others chiming in)
Edri	20	n/a	spring 2007	1 (with others chiming in)
Meori	15	n/a		2 (with others chiming in)
Hussein	40s	Roki's father		3 (2 with others chiming in, 1 focus group with Omer and Mimoza)
Omer	40s	Roki & Toni's uncle		1 (focus group with Hussein and Mimoza)
Osmi	30s	Roki & Toni's uncle		1 (private)
Mimoza	40s	Toni's mother		1 (focus group with Hussein and Omer)
Refugee community leader	50s	n/a		1 (with others chiming in)
Sanela	24	Roki's sister		2 (focus groups with Antonela and Gavidije)
Antonela	22	Roki's sister		2 (focus groups with Sanela and Gavidije)
Gavidije	20	Roki's sister		2 (focus groups with Sanela and Antonela)
Osman ²	30s	Roki & Toni's uncle (lives in Kosovo)	spring 2007	1 (with others chiming in)
Ema	24	Osman's neighbor & distant cousin	spring 2007	

In-person conversations

The conversations were informal and appropriate to Roma culture. My original intention was to conduct private interviews with a single participant at a time. This was the case for a few of the interviews. However, the participants and their families often felt uncomfortable in this setting. Most of the conversations were conducted on cushions

¹ Pseudonyms have been used to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

² Osman was the Roma colleague who originally introduced me to the Roma refugees of Šutka and served as my translator when needed.

on the floor surrounded by curious family members and mischievous noisy children, all of whom would interrupt us with something, either relevant or irrelevant. Various sisters and aunts would bustle around seeing who wanted more tea, and several people would chatter on at once. At first, this did not seem to me a proper way of conducting interviews, but it felt very natural in the setting and appropriate to the communal, social culture. Some of the interviews were conversations with one person with other opinions occasionally chiming in. Others ended up as informal focus groups or conversations between several people about a single person's experience. Each of these types of interviews elicited rich stories and experiences, and I came away with several views on one person's life story from each conversation.

My personal connection with my interview participants likely had an impact on research participation. The Kurteshi and Azemin families were happy (I think) that I was visiting them after three years and were eager to help a friend. However, many of my participants voiced initial suspicions about the interviews: Why did I want this information? I told them the purpose of my research was to learn about Roma refugee experiences with schooling, and so I wanted to interview them about their lives and schooling. Once they realized this study would help me to finish my degree, they were open and cooperative and eager to participate because "education is important for us" according to Omer (Roki and Toni's uncle). The personal connection helped the participants to trust me and open up honestly about their lives. They were enthusiastic in helping me "get a diploma," telling their stories, and hoped that my work might someday

be read by someone who can help³. The only reluctance I encountered was with Edri. Perhaps he was reluctant or perhaps he was simply “busy with my new work. I will work together with my father now.”

Sometimes interviews were mixed in terms of generation or gender but most were not. For example, some took place with groups of uncles and older nephews. In these settings, they preferred to discuss their status, the workings and rumors of UNHCR, and other community issues. These interviews were conducted sitting on crates on porches or in smoky living rooms. They were eager to tell the story of their community and their hopes for their families. Or in groups of male youth who were eager to tell their stories to someone who would find them fascinating and important. Or groups of shy girls who would become less shy the more we talked. The English speaking youth were also excited to practice their English and show off their linguistic skills.

Email conversations

I was not able to conduct in-person interviews with Roki during the original spring 2006 interviews. He was the sole participant of that study. The interviews therefore took place over email and online chat in order to communicate rapidly and efficiently. He spends a significant amount of time in internet cafés in Skopje, and we agreed to meet online for a couple of hours over the course of several Mondays. Online interviews face several limitations: they do not allow the interviewer to gauge any non-verbal communication on the part of the participant, nor do they allow the interviewer much opportunity to observe the setting or any interactions the participant has with others. However, they do allow the participant time to think and reflect about his/her

³ I tried to make it clear that I am only a student, and this study is not likely to be widely read. They understood. They like me and were eager to help with my research. They were also happy to tell their stories to someone who found them important.

answers, which is important in this case since the participants do not speak English natively. I was prepared to find a way to translate any answers given in Serbian or Romanes but Roki took this interview as an opportunity to practice his English and found a way to describe his thoughts in that language during the entire interview. This was also the case for the in-person interviews with both Rock and Toni in August 2006.

Some of the email interviews were conducted in the spring of 2007 with the English speaking youth (Roki and Toni) and two adult community members. This gave me a chance to ask follow up questions if I did not receive sufficient elaboration during the in-person interviews in August 2006. It also gave the participants a chance to be candid in case they did not want to say something in front of their families. This was rarely the case, however. Their opinions, stories, choice of words, etc. were generally the same when they were alone with me or with their families. Since Roki was the only interview participant to participate in all three rounds of interviews, I have more information and quotes from him than any of the others.

Confidentiality

After the August interviews, I typed my handwritten interview transcripts and observations. I used these, as well as the transcripts from online chat and email interviews, as data to analyze by coding. They remain password protected on my computer in order to ensure confidentiality.

All the participants were informed about my study and that I wanted to interview them about their lives, experiences as refugees, and experiences with schooling. Several of them wrestled with issues about confidentiality. On the one hand, they were nervous about participating in case their stories should fall into the wrong hands. On the other

hand, they want their stories to reach the right hands. They want people to know their stories. Several of the interview participants want their real names, or at least nicknames to be used. However, I have used pseudonyms throughout this thesis in order to ensure confidentiality.

None of the interview participants agreed to be recorded. They unanimously agreed it would make them shy because they had never been recorded before. They were also afraid of recordings falling into the wrong hands. When I expressed curiosity, I was informed that their war experiences had made them fear Albanians⁴, and perhaps publicizing their stories would incur further wrath of the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army. I respected the wishes of my participants and refrained from recording any conversations, although I find it unlikely that my writing will reach the KLA. Instead, I took notes and exact quotes to the best of my ability.

Language issues

There were language issues that varied from person to person. Some spoke well enough to conduct an interview entirely in English (Roki, Toni, Osman, Ema); some spoke no English and I used a translator (Osmi, Omer, Mimoza, Meori, refugee community leader); some spoke some English and fell back on a translator when they could not express their thoughts properly (Hussein, Sanela, Antonela, Gavdije, Edri). The participants who chose to speak in English did so in part to make the interview easier for me but mostly to practice and show off their English. As will be later discussed, this is important for them. There were other advantages to conducting the interviews in English. Speaking about languages also served as an effective icebreaker while we discussed whether to use a translator or not and whether we should conduct the interview

⁴ See Chapter two for more information about the roots of their fear and war trauma.

in Romanes, English or a combination of the two. This sparked several conversations about languages, an important source of social capital and pride for my interview participants. This revealed the deep importance of languages to the refugees. The very fact that the interviews were conducted in English was meaningful.

When a translator was necessary, I hired a former colleague of mine who is currently employed as a professional interpreter for the Swiss, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian embassies in Kosovo. He is a Rom with a high level of proficiency in English. In addition to English and Romanes, he also speaks Serbian, Albanian, German, and Macedonian⁵. Occasionally Roki translated for me when the interviews were more impromptu.

There are variances in the grammar of some participants because some of the information was gathered via email interviews with poor written grammar, some was gathered via in-person interviews in English. The language in these varied as well. Some were conducted with the help of an interpreter with excellent, although not quite perfect English. Some were conducted with the help of an interpreter who can communicate well and express thoughts at a high level in English, but did not have good grammar. Others were conducted entirely in English with participants who were comfortable, even happy, expressing their thoughts in English but have imperfect grammar. Therefore, the quotes I have used have varying degrees of grammatical errors. I have tried to capture the words and the meanings of my participants to the best of my

⁵ The internationals often hire Roma as interpreters for several reasons. They generally make linguistically versatile employees because they do not have the same prejudices towards speaking Serbian as the Albanians, nor towards speaking Albanian as the Serbs, and they speak a third language (Romanes) as well. International agencies also feel pressure to hire minorities and represent the ethnic diversity of Kosovars. UNMIK states in its “2000 Assessment of the Situation of Ethnic Minorities in Kosovo” that within its structure and “the wider humanitarian framework, concerted efforts have been made to encourage employment of minorities.” It lists the employees as being primarily “assistants, translators, and technical personnel.” The internationals are hiring few minorities for positions with responsibility.

ability and have not corrected their original words. When an interpreter was used, I have kept the English grammar of the interpreter (with the exception of Roki's autobiography, which I have edited). There are variances in the grammar of Roki's and Toni's quotes because some were taken from their email interviews and some from their spoken interviews. Both of them have far better spoken English than written English.

Limitations

There are some linguistic limitations to these interviews. The participants are all multilingual and have varying degrees of English. Therefore, some interviews had to be conducted either in imperfect English or with an interpreter. This opens the possibility for losing linguistic nuances and subtle meanings. This was further compounded by my inability to record conversations. However, I have tried my best to capture these nuances and subtleties as much as possible.

Having examined the experiences of only four participants limits my ability to generalize about the needs of refugees. However, the small sample size also allows me to explore a few refugee experiences in depth and focus on those individuals' unique life histories.

CHAPTER TWO. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This chapter provides background information and context for: the 1999 war in Kosovo, Roma history and culture, the refugee community in Šutka, the definition of youth, the definition of refugees, community history (life in Kosovo, flight from war, setting up life in Šutka), and the current situation/political climate/refugee status of the refugees.

The 1999 war in Kosovo

The roots of the ethnic tensions in Kosovo lie in the construction of incompatible histories by the Albanians and Serbs, in which both are the victims and the rightful heirs of Kosovo (Sommers, 2004). The recent trigger happened in 1989 when the Yugoslav government began to revoke some previously granted autonomy in many of its provinces, including Kosovo. This sparked a series of events that ultimately led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Kosovar Albanians responded to the sudden centralization by setting up underground schools where their children could study their own language. This emergence of a parallel education system and the ideological struggle for central versus local control of school curricula were factors which significantly exacerbated the ethnic tension of Kosovo throughout the 1990s. The parallel system became a focal point in the political resistance and cultural identification for the Albanians. Teachers, who lived on meager donations, were considered heroes (Sommers, 2004). The late 1990s saw a more violent response with the formation of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), who frequently clashed with the Serbian military police. Serbia cracked down on the Albanian resistance and prompted a NATO bombing campaign from March to June 1999,

during and after which nearly a million Albanians and thousands of Serbs and Roma were forced to flee their homes⁶.

Roma⁷ history/culture

The Roma are believed to have originated on the Indian subcontinent and begun migrating west approximately 1,000 years ago. The Diaspora now ranges from the Americas to Africa to Europe to parts of Asia. Although it is difficult to ascertain an exact number, it is estimated that there are approximately 12 million Roma (Patrin, 1999) scattered in a worldwide Diaspora, with many concentrated in Eastern and Central Europe.

Discrimination and persecution have been pervasive through much of Roma history, most infamously during World War II when 1.5 million Roma were killed in the Holocaust (Patrin, 1999). Other examples include the forced sterilization of Romani women (ERRC, 2005) and the segregation of Roma children into substandard schools throughout much of Europe (ERRC, 2004).

The Roma consist of many groups based on territorial, cultural, dialectical, and professional differences (for example, the Kalderash are traditionally associated with copper-smithing, and the Lowara with horse trading). Both of the families interviewed for this study belong to the Kovači (pronounced ‘kovachi’), an ethnic sub-group of the

⁶ A timeline of the event of the conflict in Kosovo can be found in the appendices.

⁷ The label of “Roma” is often a contentious one and its use should be justified. The group usually referred to as “Roma” or “Gypsies” is a loosely related group of ethnicities, some of which prefer a different label (Roma, Rroma, Gypsies, Travelers, Kalderash, Sinti, etc.). In Kosovo, for example, the Ashkali and Egyptians prefer to distance themselves from the Roma and be called Ashkali and Egyptians although many Kosovars see them as Roma. Since the war, these three groups have come to be known as the RAE. In order to accommodate the groups that wish to distance themselves from the label of “Roma” some authors use the term “Gypsy” with a note that they do not use the term in a pejorative way. However, the term carries racist connotations in so many contexts that I do not wish to use it. I use “Roma” because it is the most commonly accepted usually non-derisive term, and because the Kurteshis and the Azemins prefer it.

Roma who have traditionally worked as blacksmiths in the Balkans. The Kurteshis cannot remember their ancestors working as blacksmiths for at least two or three generations. The Azemins, however, worked in this trade until the war. Toni's father, grandfather, and possibly more ancestors, all were blacksmiths. The Kovači that left Kosovo no longer work in this trade or, in many cases, any other trade they had before 1999. There is still at least one blacksmith in the Kosovar village where Roki still has family members. Toni's father now finds occasional work painting houses. The Roma in Šutka primarily consist of four ethnic groups, of which Kovači is the smallest. Most of the Kovači in Šutka now are refugees from Kosovo.

Most Roma speak one of several versions of Romani (also known as Romanes), as Indo-Aryan language group consisting of seven related but often mutually unintelligible languages and many dialects (Gordon, 2005). Multilingualism is common; they often also speak the languages of the countries they live in.

Roma culture is very diverse, with wide ranging beliefs and customs. Most Roma adopt the religion of the dominant culture but retain some unique traditions. There are a few attributes common to most Roma groups. They include loyalty to extended family, and an adaptability to changing conditions (Patrin, 1999), a necessity during waves of migration, some voluntary and some forced, such as the recent waves of Roma refugees fleeing the war-torn Balkans. Their linguistic versatility is often a mechanism of adapting to new contexts. As a population who always finds itself outside the cultural mainstream, multilingualism provides a means to shift between cultures and adapt to life as a minoritized people within another culture. Strong family bonds and a communal

culture also characterize Roma life. Households tend to be multi-generational as most Roma marry young and husbands bring their wives to live with their families.

Who is a refugee?

The participants in this study are not technically refugees because they have not been granted refugee status, nor the rights that come with it. They are asylum seekers, or “those who have crossed international borders in search of safety and refugee status in another country” (Rutter, 1998, p.14). The Macedonian government has repeatedly denied refugee status to most Roma refugees even though the Council of Europe standard time period for recognizing asylum seekers as refugees is five years (Bedard, et. al., 2005). While their status is technically temporary in this case, “the term ‘temporary’ is as much a political expedient as an accurate description” (Powell, Whitty, & Youdell, 1998, p.35) as their ‘temporary’ solution can continue indefinitely. As of August 2006, they had been ‘temporarily’ in Macedonia for over seven years.

I refer to the participants in this study as refugees. I do so in part because they fled from persecution and war (Rutter, 1998). However, the single most important reason for doing so is that they themselves adopt this label. Although they do not yet have refugee status and are technically labeled ‘asylum seekers’ by UNHCR, they know they are refugees. They know they lost their homes and fled because of a war in which they were not involved. They are telling the world they are refugees and victims of other people’s war.

Who is a youth?

While much of this study examines the opinions of adults and community attitudes, the focus is on youth, their experiences with schooling, and their attitudes to education. The United Nations defines ‘youth’ as

those persons falling between the ages of 15 and 24 years inclusive. Many countries also draw a line on youth at the age at which a person is given equal treatment under the law – often referred to as the ‘age of majority’. This age is often 18 in many countries, and once a person passes this age, they are considered to be an adult. However, the operational definition and nuances of the term ‘youth’ often vary from country to country, depending on the specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors. Within the category of ‘youth’, it is also important to distinguish between teenagers (13-19) and young adults (20-24), since the sociological, psychological and health problems they face may differ.

Source: United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development

My interview participants, ranging in age from 15 to 20, fall within the UN definition of youth. More importantly, I am choosing to define them as youth because their culture defines them as such. Roma culture tends to define youth, not so much by age or independence, but by marital status and family responsibilities. For example, a married 19 year old with children and either housekeeping or breadwinning responsibilities is much less likely to be considered a youth than a single 24 year old. The youth in my study are all single, and while they are feeling the pressure to find careers and contribute to the family income, are not yet doing so in substantial amounts. Rather, they are still trying to get an education and wish to postpone marriage for several more years. It is also possible that their youth is being prolonged by their refugee status. According to Hussein (Roki’s father), there can be “no marriages now because there is no life here in Macedonia, no education, no work, no future” during their period of limbo.

Youth have been “woefully overlooked” (Lowicki, 1999, p.2) in development efforts because young children are seen as the vulnerable group needing protection and because youth are seen as more capable and able to care for themselves. However, youth are at risk for certain things children are not. These include: recruitment into military

service or gangs, vulnerability to economic and sexual exploitation; they may head households and have the responsibilities but not the rights of a household head; they are less likely to attend school and/or learn a trade and therefore “lack opportunities for gainful employment and a meaningful role in society” (Lowicki, 1999, p.2). The latter reason is a particular danger to the Roma refugee youth of Šutka. Lowicki also adds that the “strengths and potential (of youth) as constructive contributors to their societies go largely unrecognized and unsupported by the international community” (p.2) much to the detriment of society.

Refugee community in Šutka

There are approximately 2,000 Roma refugees from Kosovo currently in Macedonia, most of whom have yet to receive official refugee status (Bedard, et. al., 2005). They have been living in limbo since the war in 1999 waiting for refugee status/asylum in any country that will take them. So far, none will. Their lives have been put on hold in terms of careers, building homes, establishing roots, and for the youth, education. Meanwhile, they have very little voice in the international community that is stalling on deciding their fate.

The refugees fled from small villages in the surroundings of Priština, the capital of Kosovo. Most of the refugees who crossed the southern border into Macedonia came to Camp Stenkovec, a refugee camp outside of the town of Šuto Orizari, a Roma suburb more commonly known as “Šutka” located near the capital city of Skopje. It is the only municipality in the world governed by a Rom mayor and residents often claim it to be the largest Roma community in the world.

During August, Šutka is hot, dry, and dusty under a relentless and oppressive sun. Everyone ambles slowly, no one is ever in a hurry and yet somehow the streets are always bustling with people, street vendors, small shops, and traffic with a mind of its own. Members of extended families sit together on front stoops waiting for more family to come by so they can listen to music together. The traffic increases for the summer wedding season as uncles, cousins, second cousins twice removed, and other relatives drive their ostentatious cars down from all over Western Europe for the weddings of family members. Šutka becomes more alive at night. One has only to follow the inevitable music to find a Romani band and an entire wedding party dancing in the streets before retrieving the bride. According to Roki, weddings are so frequent that “here in Šutka people get married without reason.”

Romanes is the native language of both the refugees from Kosovo and the native citizens of Šutka, although they come from different ethnic groups and speak different dialects of Romanes. They are both very multilingual communities and speak the languages that surround them as well as their own in order to adapt and interact with the variety of cultures they encounter in this region. Most refugee youth and adults speak both Serbian and Albanian at a near-native level, as these were the languages of their former home. Children speak them, but not as well. In the past seven years, they have also had an opportunity to acquire a fairly high level of fluency in Macedonian, a Slavic language very closely related to Serbian. They are also very fluent in Macedonian Romanes. In addition, many of the young refugees speak some English and/or German learned from relatives who once fled to Western Europe or from UNHCR workers in Skopje.

Refugee youth in their late teens and early twenties in this community have been facing serious obstacles to completing their educations. Most had some basic schooling in Kosovo before 1999 but none were able to complete primary school. The war interrupted the schooling of most youth at various stages of primary school. They have already missed out on many formative years and are reaching the age when they are expected to contribute to family earnings. The Refugee Education Project in Macedonia found that only 44% of Roma refugee children in Macedonia (most of whom lived in the refugee camp in Šutka) from ages 7 to 14 were attending school regularly in 2002. 30% had dropped out altogether. Many of these children cited teasing, and peer, family, and work pressures as the reasons that keep them from school (Refugee Education Project, 2002). This was one year after the refugee camp school had closed, and the children were expected to integrate into local Šutka schools. The same study found that only 16% of Roma refugee mothers and 27% of Roma refugee fathers had finished primary school. Despite these low levels of education, 73% of all the parents interviewed believed that “the future is in education” for their children (Refugee Education Project, 2002).

Throughout Šutka, most Roma students drop out of school in their early teens, a significantly lower level of education than the Macedonian average. Early marriage is a common reason for failure to complete secondary school. McDonald estimates that approximately only 50% of Roma in Macedonia⁸ above the age of 15 have completed primary school (grades 1-8). Of those, 11.6% have completed secondary and only .6% have completed any tertiary education (McDonald, 2006). According to the ERRC, for “a number of reasons, including the unavailability of financing and the hostile

⁸ While the official Roma population is 53,879, other estimates place the actual figure at about 135,000 (7% of the total population) although it is difficult to be precise (McDonald, 2006).

atmosphere in Macedonian schools, there is a generation of Romani children in Macedonia who are effectively cut off from education” (ERRC, 1998, p.90). Therefore, the refugees are not in an environment that values education highly and are having trouble finishing even primary school.

Roma refugee community history (life in Kosovo, flight from war, new life in Šutka)

This study focused on the youth of two extended families, the Kurteshis and the Azemins. Both families come from small Albanian-dominated villages located near Priština, the capital of Kosovo. Both families had lived in their villages for several generations until forced to flee during the war in 1999.

The Azemins come from the village of Žižkov.⁹ Hussein, the head of the Kurteshi family, was born in a small village near Vršovice as were his father and grandfather. When he was nine, his father built a house for his family in Vršovice, and Hussein built a house there for himself when he got married. He remembers how it was a traditional village, and all the marriages were arranged. However, he “was first generation to change tradition” because he met his future wife and “secretly went to pictures and dates before the wedding” in her village of Vinohrady. He was very proud to usher in a new era “for my children because now they can choose a husband or wife” for themselves. However, there can be “no marriages now because there is no life here in Macedonia, no education, no work, no future.” All six of his children were born in Vršovice.

Both families fled their villages as soon as they could after the bombing started in the spring of 1999. They then spent many traumatic months going from one refugee

⁹ The names of villages in Kosovo are identifying features since both villages had very few Roma families before the war. Therefore, both village names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

camp to another as they felt in danger. Both families eventually made it to the refugee camp Stenkovec outside Šutka where they stayed until 2003.

In 2003 UNHCR closed the camp and encouraged the refugees to assimilate into the Šutka Roma society. The refugees resisted because they felt UNHCR was abandoning them in a place without options for work or school without finding a real solution to their temporary status. The refugees decided to try to relocate themselves to a better place. Nearly all 2,000 refugees went to the Greek border in May 2003 and spent twelve weeks trying to get permission to cross. By August, they were suffering from desperate conditions. They were eventually denied asylum, they ran out of food and water, they had several problems with heat stroke, and were forced to return to Šutka (Polansky, 2003) and attempt to assimilate. There is no longer any camp and UNHCR now supports the refugees with housing and living expenses but not education or work.

While both families have some extended family members still left in Kosovo, there are no longer any Roma in either of their two villages. The Kurteshis have seen photographs of the bombed ruins of what used to be their house. Most are refugees in Macedonia and Germany. Those few left in Kosovo live in Serb majority villages, which are in segregated enclaves under the protection of the NATO-led international Kosovo forces (KFOR). Osman, an uncle, is one of the family members who stayed in a Serb village of Kosovo but is sorry he did so. He is desperate to get his wife and small children out of Kosovo before independence because then “the situation of the Roma will be worse” under an Albanian dominated government. Osman has attended several UNMIK and OSCE meetings regarding the security and integration of the Roma in order to judge the situation and now believes that “it is only written on paper that the Roma

will be integrated and safe.” He is currently researching all legal and illegal means of escape. While Roma children who stayed in Kosovo have been able to attend school regularly since 1999 (or at least as regularly as Roma children can), an advantage not possible for the refugees, they also live in fear for their lives should Kosovo become independent or should the Albanian riots start again.¹⁰

Current situation/political climate/refugee status

One afternoon I was taken to see the refugee community leader to talk about the situation of the refugees in Šutka. According to him, UNHCR is looking for an easy way to get rid of Roma refugees by either sending them back to Kosovo or having Macedonia give them asylum instead of finding a solution in a third country, which would be better for his community. However, “Macedonia does not have the resources to support refugees and won’t do it.” He added that “Roma don’t want to make trouble” in whatever country they end up in. They only want “to live in peace and follow the laws.”

The refugee community leader wanted me to interview him because I needed to hear about “the Roma situation from a Rom” because “there is too much discrimination and no one else in Europe tells the truth.” He told me that “UNHCR sees us Roma as problems, the Serbs see us as Albanians, the Albanians see us as Serb sympathizers. All see us as dirty thieves. But the Roma only want to be seen as men.”

The refugees now live in a climate of fear, frustration, and hope. They live in fear that they will be sent back and relive the trauma of war, fear of being caught in the middle of ethnic tensions, fear of being the object of ethnic hatred for two sides that both vastly outnumber them, and they fear reliving what happened to Osmi (explanation

¹⁰ See the *Timeline of the 1999 war in Kosovo* in the appendices for more information about the Albanian riots in 2004.

below). They also live in frustration of being in limbo in a place where their educations and careers are put on hold. And they live in hope that they can move on to a third country where they can live in peace and have education and career opportunities.

Fear Both the Kurteshis and the Azemins live in fear of deportation, especially as rumors and threats of deportation reach them every few months. While in Macedonia I witnessed the emotional turbulence they experience regularly. One afternoon Hussein (Roki's father) and Omer (uncle) gathered the men, their older sons, and me. They had bad news: they had just returned from UNHCR where they had heard that many of the Roma who do not have asylum, which is most of them, were soon going to be deported to either Serbia or Kosovo. Hussein laughed bitterly and added "how nice. We can choose if we want to be killed by the Albanians or Serbs." A few days later, however, they were able to schedule a meeting with UNHCR, pleaded their case, and received a promise that they will not be deported because they have 'special circumstances;' a document stating that the Albanians in their former village are still hostile to them. According to Roki, the document is "something very bad... they [their Albanian neighbors] are saying we are guilty, and we wanted to kill their sons. That is not truth, but they mean that is truth." The refugees are sure that they cannot return "because if we are going in Vršovice then they will kill us, they are very danger to us Roma." The political reasons behind this:

If Kosovo is independent then Roma can't go back. I am sure that Albanians will accept us just to fill the standards [fulfill the UN stated mandates of ethnic diversity and security], and then when they will get independence they will kick us off (Toni).

The fear of deportation stems from their belief that the ethnic hatred has not subsided and from their traumatic experiences during the war, the worst of which was the kidnapping of their uncle Osmi a few months before the war began "when the Serbs and Albanians started to hate each other and be violent and the Albanians were starting problems where

we lived” (Osmi). The bus he was taking home from work detoured from its usual route and took him to a known KLA hangout. From there he was kidnapped, blindfolded, taken to an unknown location, and then four men “starting stomping on me with boots and pistol whipping me on my chest, stomach and all over my body. They asked me... ‘are you on the side of the Serbs, Gypsy?!’ and then they continued beating me... I was sure I would be killed.” Finally, they left him badly injured in a forest. He later discovered two of his former classmates were involved in the beatings. After this, he was “scared to leave my house until we fled to Macedonia in the war as refugees.” Nowadays his greatest fear is if “after independence the Macedonian government and UNHCR will deport us to Kosovo... I will die if that happens. The UÇK [KLA] will remember me. This is why I can never go back to Kosovo.”¹¹ Osmi’s entire family now lives with the traumatic memories of what happened to him, the bombings, the ethnic cleansing, and their dangerous escape from their homes to Macedonia. Roki is “really scared sometimes from what I passed in the war. I’m scared deep in my soul. I am trauma from war. It was terrible for a child.”

Frustration Their status, and therefore their future, is constantly changing and yet for seven years nothing has really changed. This combination makes their period of limbo an excruciating one – on the one hand, they seem to be stuck interminably in a place without many opportunities for them; on the other hand, they feel constantly at risk of being sent somewhere else (either a place they fear or long to be). The trauma they experienced during the war is compounded by the emotional turbulence they face regarding their refugee status and uncertain futures. In addition to this, the youth are frustrated by the lack of educational opportunities: “I try this and I try that and I try and I

¹¹ The entire interview can be found in the appendices.

try and I try a hundred times but always nothing... I want one day have my personal home and try to finish my school and have a job, I am trying in everything but nothing works” (Roki).

Hope Although no end to their limbo has yet presented itself, there is still hope among the refugee community that it is a period of temporary limbo after all and that they will receive asylum in another country. They recently applied for asylum in Canada and are awaiting a response. This hope exists for education as well. Although Roki is frustrated that “we have no choice to go to normal school directly,” he still plans to “stay with the bad conditions and hope for normal school in the future.”

CHAPTER THREE.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS

Until recently, “relief efforts have taken priority over education reconstruction in crisis and post-conflict settings. Education has been regarded as a secondary concern that could wait until more immediate needs were addressed” (Affolter & Miller, 2002, p.3). Reluctance to provide education in emergencies stems from the fact that schools are costly and time consuming to establish and run, education does not seem as pressing as food and shelter, governments involved are weak, and establishing schools may hinder repatriation efforts if the refugees do not want to leave (Sommers, 2002). Humanitarian organizations channel their energies into meeting basic needs while “education is hardly ever adequately addressed and is often the first one targeted for cut-backs during times of crisis” (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998, p.10). There are numerous compelling arguments for making education in emergencies a priority (Nicolai, 2002). However, they are not globally understood and therefore insufficiently funded, possibly due to the way emergency education has been conceptualized; not as a matter of survival on the level of food and shelter (Pigozzi, 1999).

After the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1989, the world became much more conscious of the education and protection needs of children in emergency situations (Seitz, 2004). Since then, the previous assumption has been challenged and a new consensus is emerging that education is a top priority. Its delay may exacerbate instability (Affolter & Miller, 2002, p.4). It is now increasingly recognized that “humanitarian assistance cannot be reduced merely to the supply of food, medicine and blankets; there must be a close link between the concept of ‘relief,’ ‘rehabilitation’ and

‘long-term development’... This idea has gained ground: there is growing recognition of the principle that victims of conflicts have an equally inalienable right to education as all other human beings” (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998, p.5). As a result, “Agencies and personnel working with refugees increasingly view schools as a central pillar for providing vital services that assist refugees in their survival and rehabilitation” (Mosselson, 2007, p.95).

Despite increased awareness, “the continued inadequate response to the educational, emotional, and vocational needs of youths during crises remains a serious weakness in the emergency education field...youth programming remains seriously underfunded and underdeveloped” (Sommers, 2002, p.21). According to Lowicki, writing in 1999, education (especially for adolescents) is not often prioritized in humanitarian assistance because there may be a lack of consensus over the curriculum, there is a fear of long term commitments, or the importance of education may not be recognized. Instead, the belief still persists that “other critical needs are emphasized, such as food, water, shelter and medical care” (Lowicki, 1999, p.2).

Postponing school until a conflict is over can mean that a child will never attend school again. Education in emergency and post conflict settings plays an important role in both societal and individual healing. The growing number of authors advocating the importance of emergency education justify it in three ways. They argue that education is a right for all children, including those affected by war who might not have easy access; they argue that it contributes “to the future economic/human resource development of countries in crisis” (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998, p.8); and they point to the potentially positive benefits it can have on children, their families, and their communities.

Education as a right

Authors wishing to stress the importance of emergency education often refer to education as an “inalienable right,” (Pigozzi, 1999, p.i) and the fact that “the right to free and compulsory primary education without discrimination is now enshrined in international law” (Nicolai, 2002, p.6) in such documents as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All. Of these, the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) is perhaps “regarded as the most significant human rights document to lay down the special protection needs of children in emergency situations...and able to provide some orientation for the planning of educational measures under conditions of armed conflict” (Seitz, 2004, p.9). The CRC states that:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
 - (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
 - (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need.

Source: Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28, 1990, p.8

In the CRC, “primary education, which is mostly associated with younger children, is seen as a fundamental right” (Lowicki, 1999, p.1). However, secondary schools and vocational training, which are usually associated with older youth, are not mandatory, but merely encouraged. This may act “as a policy barrier that may help to explain the absence of adolescents on the donor and international community agendas” (Lowicki, 1999, p.1). Since secondary education is not a priority, schooling opportunities for youth may be limited, and “the neglect of comprehensive educational opportunities for

adolescents produces grave consequences, not only for these individuals, but also for the larger society” (Lowicki, 1999, p.1).

The role of education for communities and societies as a whole

Education invariably acts as a cultural and social institution that is used by society to instill national, community, and religious values; attitudes; and certain types of knowledge in its younger citizens (Pigozzi, 1999; Chung, 1999). It can therefore be used to maintain the social status quo, or to bring about change in worldviews and values (Chung, 1999, p.1). It may challenge dominant forms of socialization. It can ameliorate or exacerbate conflict. Education can be a means of promoting tolerance or it can also be “a key medium with which ethnicity is mobilized for the escalation of conflicts” (Seitz, 2004, p.10). For example, Davis describes several instances “in which educational materials were used to train young minds in a fanatical form of loyalty” (Davis, 2002, p.91) during different periods of Afghani recent history. A similar example occurred in 1994 when some refugee camp schools for refugees from Rwanda advocated genocide in the curriculum (Sommers, 2002, p.1). Prior to 1999, the Serbian-dominated government of Kosovo eliminated the Albanian language from the classroom and textbooks. In response, Albanian Kosovars sent their children to illegal Albanian language schools and created a schism within the education system where the two groups fomented ethnic tensions (Sommers, 2002, p.1). Any particular group “that is prevented from gaining access to basic primary school education can never aspire to significant administrative or political representation within its country...which in turn may condemn following generations to a life of exclusion from social and economic standing” (Majekodunni, 1999, p.1). Therefore, lack of access to education tends to exacerbate conflict. Chung

provides the example that “in both Rwanda and Sierra Leone, unemployed and poorly educated youths play key roles in committing atrocities” (Chung, 1999, p.2). Less educated people are more likely to accept and perpetuate inherited prejudices, whereas educated people are more likely to break the cycle of violence and look for commonalities.

While war, crisis or conflict come at a devastating cost to the people involved, they can “open space for diverse social and organizational arrangements for learning to flourish” (Affolter & Miller, 2002, p.10) perhaps not possible in peaceful times. They offer the chance to rebuild and transform schooling so that it peacefully meets the needs of diverse groups within the conflict zone (Pigozzi, 1999). The dramatic changes and destabilization of old institutions brought by war “offer a window of opportunity for educational development, innovations and improvement in the transition from emergencies” (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998, p.10).

Just as education can exacerbate a conflict if teachers operate from a stance of stereotyping and prejudice, it can also help prevent war and foster a peaceful society if teachers impart social justice and conflict resolution skills (Pigozzi, 1999). Education in crisis situations “helps to prevent conflict and fosters a peaceful society by encouraging conflict resolution, environmental awareness, tolerance of diversity... and by addressing the immediate needs and preparing for a better post-emergency society” (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998, p.10). There are strong links between education, security, and peacebuilding so schooling can help “reestablish social stability and facilitate the acquisition of basic competencies needed for economic recovery in the long term” (Affolter & Miller, 2002, p.4).

However, very few initiatives have been taken to provide war-affected adolescents with the opportunity to study, and especially continue beyond primary school (Lowicki, 1999). This lack “has present and future consequences for these particular adolescent individuals, as well as for society as a whole” (Lowicki, 1999, p.3), because uneducated children and youth are “vulnerable to a future of poverty, more easily drawn into violence and lack the complex skills so important to their society’s reconstruction and development” (Nicolai, 2002, p.10).

The role of education in the lives of children and their families

Recent literature on the important of emergency education cites a number of ways in which education is critical for children, their families, and community:

schools provide children with structure, a routine that creates an environment for normalcy, hope for the future, intellectual stimulation and , not least, time for parents to work while their children are constructively engaged. School also replaces idle time that left children prone to recalling traumatic memories and limiting their development (Sommers, 2002, p.22).

education is a primary means to psychological healing, skills-building, training for livelihood, peacemaking, social reintegration, good health practices and re-establishing a sense of normalcy and structure after destruction and chaos (Lowicki, 1999, p.4).

Emergency education needs to “bring together recreational activities, trauma therapy, the teaching of practical everyday competencies and skills, and peace education measure” (Seitz, 2002, p.9).

War makes education’s power to provide psychosocial recovery, stability, normalcy, hope, and the inculcation of values and skills for building and maintaining a peaceful future at least as essential as it is during peacetime (Sommers, 2002, p.23).

The four main themes that arise from these discussions are that education is important for war-affected children because it can provide: psychosocial support– dealing with past trauma, normalcy, stability, routine; alternative to dangers– idleness and boredom leading to exploitation, recruitment, violence, criminality; necessary information – health, landmines, literacy, numeracy, etc.; and education can help children rebuild their lives and hope for the future. Education can equip children with methods for dealing with

trauma in their past, avoiding further dangers, and for looking and acting constructively towards the future.

Psychosocial support and healing After the trauma of war, education is critical in fostering resilience and psychosocial well-being in refugees (Jones & Rutter, 1998; Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Mosselson, 2007). Refugees come from a range of ethnicities, nationalities, social classes, and religions. Their backgrounds, resources, experiences of war and flight, needs, family situations all vary significantly but despite heterogeneity, “the vulnerability of their circumstances, and the crucial education stage at which they arrive, young refugees share a set of common and urgent needs” (Mosselson, 2007, p.97). These needs stem from their experiences of war and exile, both of which are traumatic ruptures or discontinuities in their lives which “deeply affect the psychological well-being of refugee youths” (Mosselson, 2007, p.95) often by causing depression or feelings of hopelessness. However, refugees are often determined and resilient, having already experienced the trauma of war, survived, and navigated through a new culture and the resettlement process.

War and conflict are “major psychosocial stressors with long-lasting effects that influence learning” (Pigozzi, 1999, p.1). Emergency education can and should help war-affected children deal with traumatic pasts, and regain a sense of normalcy, stability, and routine because there are strong connections between psychological well-being and learning (Affolter & Miller, 2002), and because “in a long-term crisis, education can be a critical part of providing meaning in life” (Nicolai, 2002, p.10). The objectives of education in emergencies should include meeting the psychosocial needs of war-affected children (Aguilar and Retamal, 1998) because

child survivors of wars are commonly blanketed by loss (including of their childhood) and burdened by severe traumatic stress distress. For them, school can become as essential form of psychological intervention, a critically important step on the road to recovery and a bulwark against what can be severe and profoundly destructive (including self-destructive) behavior (Sommers, 2002, p.8).

Affolter and Miller detail basic needs for psychological well-being (Affolter & Miller, 2002, p.11). These include physical and psychological security, effectiveness and working to fulfill one's potential, having a positive identity, having positive connections and relationships with others, and an understanding of the world and one's place in it (having a sense of meaningfulness) (Affolter & Miller, 2002, p.11), all components of psychosocial support, healing and building resilience after a traumatic experience. Education can play a role in helping affected communities to cope with and understand their own and their children's reactions to the conflict (Nicolai, 2002).

Returning to school is important because the recreational and educational activities offered are crucial in alleviating stress, raising self-esteem, and overall psychosocial well-being (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998). Routine and structured activities give traumatized children the "stability that they lack in the midst of an emergency" (Nicolai, 2002, p.9). Daily routines that include schooling can help entire families regain a sense of normalcy and ease parents' fears (Nicolai, 2002, p.9). Raffaelli and Koller found that "girls who exhibited the highest levels of resilience had more structured life plans regarding work and family, and were optimistic about their ability to overcome their stressful life situations" (Raffaelli & Koller, 2005, p.5). Activities such as musical groups, dance ensembles, art festivals, or sports competitions can help facilitate the healing process of traumatic events, can help children return to normal social and developmental patterns (Nicolai, 2002), and they can play a fundamental role in building resilience among children who have been victims of war. These activities help them to

make sense of and understand their traumatic pasts (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998). Play is an especially important for children because “the sooner we can intervene with play in the life of a traumatized child, the sooner the child can appropriate the healing effects of the play environment and the sooner hope will re-enter the child’s world” (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998, p.11).

Education is a major factor in the successful creation of a new life for refugees. Schools can create and restore identities based on being a student rather than a refugee. This is important because “returning to the identity of ‘student’ may allow individual retreat from the stigmatized identity of refugee” (Mosselson, 2007, p.95). Schooling can also provide a future orientation. Optimism for the future and a sense of academic accomplishment are factors found in education that can help foster resilience (Mosselson, 2007, p.98). In a recent study of Bosnian refugees in New York, Mosselson found that refugees who are given the opportunity to study are motivated and successful students with renewed future orientation. Schooling played a crucial role in the psychosocial healing in their lives. It gave them the opportunity to reconnect with a student identity, it provided them with opportunities to learn a new culture and a chance to rebuild future plans. Schooling is a crucial factor in building resilience and psychosocial healing in refugees and others affected by trauma because “education ultimately acts as a vital coping mechanism as they adapt to their new life trajectories” (Mosselson, 2007, p.110).

Security from and alternative to dangers Education can play a fundamental role in the protection of children affected by conflict because schools provide a safe and supervised environment (Nicolai, 2002). It is an especially vital protection measure because it can offer an alternative to exploitation or being a child soldier, social and

cultural alienation, violence and boredom (Sommers, 2002). This is especially important for youth, whose options for education are often rare and underfunded. As a result, “frustration and boredom are common themes in forced migrant youth lives...and it is not unusual to find them carrying out work deemed illegal” (Sommers, 2002, p.15) or encountering other dangers such as economic and sexual exploitation or abuse, prostitution, drug traffickers, military recruitment, or loss of livelihood training. (Lowicki, 1999; Nicolai, 2002). Excluding youth from educational programming “dramatically increases the prospect for increased instability and violence in their lives and communities” (Sommers, 2002, p.26).

Learning critical skills There are certain critical life skills that education can impart in conflict situations: conflict resolution skills, addressing grief and trauma, landmine awareness, health issues such as sanitation and HIV/AIDS prevention, in addition to providing literacy and numeracy skills (Pigozzi, 1999; Aguilar & Retamal, 1998). This combination of potentially life saving skills is critical for the immediate survival and long-term coping mechanisms of children affected by war (Pigozzi, 1999).

Rebuilding lives and hopes for the future Emergency education helps those affected by war to begin rebuilding their lives (Nicolai, 2002), and preparing for and acquiring useful skills for the future. It is one of the “first and most critical ways in which traumatized people can regain control over their lives” (Chung, 1999, p.4). Education is also a way to “restore in refugee youths a sense of hope for the future that had been ripped away from them” (Mosselson, 2007, p.95). Raffaelli and Koller found that “positive future expectations may enhance psychosocial adjustment” (Raffaelli &

Koller, 2005, p.3) for youth living in situations of adversity and that there is a correlation between positive future expectations and resilience.

Therefore, it is “not surprising that both parents and children are likely to see schools as a sign of hope, a sign that they can escape from the violence and suffering that have been imposed upon them by political change” (Chung, 1999, p.4). Communities themselves, including both parents and children, consider education a top priority in assistance (Nicolai, 2002). Parents want to see their children rebuilding and working towards their future.

Thus, the objectives of education in emergencies should include providing the foundation for secondary school and livelihood training and preparing for the future, and preparing children for repatriation or integration, among other things (Aguilar & Retamal, 1998). Preparation for the future is especially critical for older youth because they are entering adulthood, often early if the conflict has left them heads of households, and need to be properly prepared. Traditional opportunities often disappear during war and leave the youth at risk of “entering adulthood illiterate, poorly trained, or both” (Lowicki, 1999, p.3).

The role of education in Roma communities

As this study investigated the lives of a community who are both Roma and refugees, it is necessary to also examine the literature about Roma education. Popular perception and many studies suggest that Roma are often wary of the dominant culture’s education system and reluctant to send their children to school for fear they will learn a non-Roma way of life and a variety of other reasons. In many ways, attitudes of refugees and Roma are depicted in entirely opposite ways. While refugee parents “consider

education a top priority in assistance” (Nicolai, 2002), Tamas claims that “Romani parents might not view mainstream education as either essential or practical. Romani people often see no direct link between educational achievement and the material well-being or security of the family” (Tamas, 2001, p.297).

The Ninth Assessment of the Situation of Ethnic Minorities in Kosovo states that “children are not encouraged by their parents to attend classes nor do they appear to be enthusiastic about school, due in part to their lack of ability to communicate as effectively in the Serb language as they do in their mother tongue” (UNMIK, UNHCR & OSCE, 2002, p.24). Regan suggests that the purpose of public schools do not match with Roma views about education and childhood, which should be a period of learning through apprenticeships with older family members, and that schools are “a means by which community ties are weakened - in essence a door through which young Rom could go and not return...public schools socialize children into the mainstream culture” (Regan, 2000, p.172). He also says that public opinion often holds the racist view that Roma parents only send their children to school for welfare benefits and otherwise do not care about the education of their children (Regan, 2000). While “educational researchers and practitioners alike have tended to see Romani families and children as the cause of school failure” they have failed to “place responsibility upon the failing schooling system” (Katz, 2005, p.251). Other reasons given for Roma skepticism include: education as a threat to Roma values and norms, discrimination and violence in mainstream schools, prejudice and racism from other students, language barriers, poverty, poor social conditions, inadequate programs and teaching (Tamas, 2001; UNMIK, 2002; Regan, 2000).

One study acknowledges a positive link between education and the Roma. Mustafic, himself a Rom and a teacher, claims that “Roma above all else want to use education to raise their economic and social status, so that they would be equal to others...in the future” (Mustafic, 2003, p.299). However, many Roma children in Serbia and throughout Eastern Europe are placed in remedial or slow schools for the mentally disabled as a form of segregation and to “keep Roma in the lowest social strata as unskilled workers” (Katz, 2005, p.248). These schools leave a stigma (Mustafic, 2003) and provide a very substandard schooling experience. They are also a source of conflicting views and emotions. Roma parents often feel their children are safer in these schools than in mainstream where they can be discriminated against by non-Roma and be socialized away from their culture. However, parents also often lament the substandard opportunities for their children in the segregated system. Katz found that, although wary of the hostile environment of most schools, “Romani families are eager for their children to take advantage of education opportunities” (Katz, 2005, p.254).

CHAPTER FOUR. CONVERSATIONS WITH THE ROMA REFUGEE YOUTH

I interviewed four youth and ten family and community members. In this section, I have included the conversations with Roki and Toni as the refugee youth who have had difficulty continuing their educations. I have chosen not to include Edri's story in order to keep this chapter a reasonable length. Edri's story was the one omitted because his interview was shorter so I have less information about him. Another reason I have chosen to discuss only Roki and Toni at length is because Edri has many similarities to Toni; both he and Toni are far more disillusioned with education than Roki for similar reasons. I have included Meori's story but offered it as a contrast to the older youth. He has had a different refugee experience due largely to his age. Unless otherwise noted, the term 'refugee youth' will refer to Roki and Toni for the rest of the study because they are the ones whose interviews I analyzed in depth.

Roki's, Toni's, and Meori's stories come from email interviews and from the in-person conversations that took place in Šutka in August 2006. The topics included in each of their stories are life and schooling before 1999, wartime experiences, life and schooling after the war, hobbies, language skills, and future aspirations.

Roki's story

Roki, like Toni, was eighteen in August 2006. Until the age of 11, Roki lived with his extended family in the village of Vršovice, Kosovo. His family occupied five houses and were the only Roma residents of their Albanian majority village. Roki says that until the war his life was "very good before 1999, I had good friends and good relationship with them. I had albanian friends but not Roma, we played Football together

and walking in vilage together. they never said you are gypsy.”¹² He also remembers how he “used to hiking in church [climbing in the ruins of a church], the church was build by stones and it was very fun to clime there with Albanian frends.”

Roki’s fond memories are few because his last year in Kosovo was colored by the ethnic tensions leading up to the war. For Roki, the ethnic hatred came suddenly because his “relationship with albanian was nice before in 1998, but than change in 1999, and about how the albanian treat roma, they treat us in 1999 like criminals and bad people.” Even his former Albanian friends changed during this time. The started to “say you are gipsy and they said we will throu you to the dogs and they will eat you haha haha haha.”

His current ties with Kosovo are limited to a few extended family members who live in Serbian villages. He no longer has “contack with my friends, Karen they don't like me, and I don't like them too. I left my house because of them” because of the way they treated him during in 1999. There are no Roma in Vršovice anymore and all the former Roma houses have been destroyed.

Roki’s memories of the war:

I have memoreis when I was 11 years old and I was outside and that moment I heard Nato bombing and I feel very afraid, my father said to me don't afraid Roki, they are making Practise the ARMY, when they will finish the Practise everything will be ok, and my sisters start crying it was big panic to our house. I though that I will be dead and I will never live.

Soon after this experience his family was forced to flee the war. Roki remembers “when the war star then I left Vršovice by Crying, i feeled very bad then.” The Kurteshi family managed to “escap to our family in Plemetina Village” for six months and then they briefly stayed in a refugee camp in Obilič, Kosovo. However, the family still felt unsafe in Kosovo and waited for means of escape. They found one a few weeks later “thanks to

¹² I have kept the original language of the participants. Quotes, like this one, with grammar, spelling and/or punctuation mistakes are examples of the participants’ writing taken from the email interviews. Quotes with only grammar mistakes are from the August in-person interviews.

Paul Polansky¹³, he helped us very much, he maked Kolumn [organized a group of refugees] who are intresting to go to Macedonia, and we went together with him, in 1999, there was about 500 people.” After two weeks of walking, buses, and waiting at the Macedonian border, the Kurteshis arrived in Camp Stenkovec, next to Šutka and Roki “was very sad because of the war and feeling sick, because it was garbage around refugee camp.” After a few weeks, he became accustomed and he “start to meet with people and have fun sometimes.” They stayed in the refugee camp from 1999-2003 with the exception of a few months in 2001 when they moved to a refugee camp in the lake town of Pretor.

After four years, UNHCR closed the refugee camp down and tried to integrate the refugees into Šutka. Roki remembers that

UNHCR said we must move to the Rent house because there no good place to live, and refugees said no way, and they used force to close the camp first they closet the school than water stopt, than Electric, than no giving us AID help.

After UNHCR closed the camp, the refugees went to the Greek border but had to return a few weeks later and move into Šutka under UNHCR directions.

In early 2004, Roki’s family (consisting of his parents, one uncle, two aunts, two cousins, and three sisters) moved into a bigger, more comfortable house in Šutka than what they had at the camp. Roki describes it as having “4 rooms one kitchen and one bathrum and living room where we are staying.” He thinks “it is ok but you know how is when you don't have your own house.”

He spends his time largely playing music, attending evening courses, studying English, or “sometimes I go to skopje to walk with my friends, and have fun, music is my

¹³ Paul Polansky is an American who founded the Kosovo Roma Refugee Foundation in hopes of helping Roki’s community.

hobbi, and I like to work in computers, I like movies also. when i have free time i walk with my friends or play Game at Internet caffe.”

Roki spends much of his time learning languages and is particularly concerned with learning English. He studies diligently: “I learn english by my self, I always get in room alone and study, I am learning about 21;00 untill 22;00.” He is disappointed that at schools he has only had the opportunity to “just study lessons in Macedonian.” He would be interested in studying more languages.

Roki plays keyboard in a band called ‘Roma Talent’ with six others. The band is a family affair because “my cousins are drummer and singer, and my uncle is playing violina. He is our boss, and he teach us music.” Music is a big part of Roki’s daily life and he is proud of his musical abilities: “I am playing keyboard, and I like music. I have good talent, I am playing any music I hear, American, Roma, Srbian, and others.” The band has become a big part of his life, both because it takes much of his time and because it is a source of pride. They practice at the UNHCR office “almost everyday from 16:00 to 21:00” when they can get donations for bus passes from UNHCR or the Swedish embassy. Their next goal, assuming they can get donations, is to record a CD.

The popularity of Roma Talent is increasing, and the band plays concerts fairly often in Skopje, Šutka, and other towns. December 2006 was an especially busy month for Roma Talent because “we were invited at UNHCR Party at 15th of December, then we played at Skopje near main square, and than I had concerts the 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27th of December to play in Kumanovo, 30 km away.” They played their biggest concert ever in Šutka on April 8th, 2006 for ‘Roma International Day’ because “Roma selibrate big that day, once in a year.” There were “about 5000 Roma at the concert” but

Roki is “not nervous when I am playing with my band.”

The band is the most common reason Roki leaves the Roma enclave of Šutka and has to negotiate his way through the ethnic tensions of the region. In fall 2006 “one place where we was playing was Albanian.” They booked it by mistake and when people started asking “where we are from, and we said from Kosovo.” This was true but slightly misleading because “they thought that I am Albanian from Kosovo not Roma, so this was good. If I said that I am roma I am sure that they will don't like to hear my Music and maybe do bad things, becasue they don't like us.” The band then “started playing Albanian songs so we can stay safe.”

Much like the uncertain situation of the refugees' asylum status, the future of the band is also uncertain and dependent on outside forces. The Swedish Embassy, their chief benefactors, recently told them “they can't support our orchestra anymore, so that mean's we have to support our orchestra in our own, but we are not in possibility. it is very difficult situation.” Roki was “planning to write to some embassies here in Skopje about donation for next month but I don't know do they will help us to buy each month buss cards.” Keeping his band alive is important for Roki, so it was a relief when a few weeks later “I get e-mail from sweden royal Music Academy that they are planning to support us again.” Roki stresses how important the band is to him:

If I don't have any donation I am planing to walk from my home at practise room. It is 15 miles so departure and return is 30 miles. I have to talk will my orchestra about this, you know why? If we dont continue to practise than this orchestra will be distroyed and I don't want this.

Apart from his hobbies, Roki finds occasional work. However, he has been less lucky than Toni in finding a regular job he finds interesting. In the summer of 2006 Roki's linguistic abilities were recognized when he was considered for a six month interpreting job at UNHCR but says he lost it because “another refugee family is jealous and they

talked to Catherine Walker and someone else got the job.” He was disappointed by the loss of a possibility of regular work that would have been challenging and stimulating for him. He was able to find a one-week factory job in September 2006 but “honestly I get sick from that job because it was very cold inside and they didn't pay me lot of money.”

He sometimes accompanies his father to construction sites and learns the trade (“I am going with him when he needs help and we work together, and I help him, making ciment. we build houses in Šutka”). He enjoys it because it is a chance to learn from his father and acquire potentially useful skills (“my relationship with my father is very nice because sometimes he is teaching me a lot things like electric stove and how to make houses.”). However, this work does not provide a stable routine for Roki because it is very infrequent.

Schooling Roki “left my school in Kosovo when Nato bombing Yugoslavia.” He was in the fifth grade at the time. His school was an Albanian majority elementary, which he enjoyed, until the war. Roki remembers that “the name of the school was Zenel salihu, my favorite teacher was Osman, from my vilage, because he was teaching me very well.” He has only had sporadic formal schooling for the past eight years and is now desperate to obtain a high school diploma. His only schooling after 1999

was a UNHCR school, but than they distroyed all the schools, we not let them, but they force us to go out, I don't know why. well, I liked that school and when it closet down I was very sad then. it was very nice teaching.

According to some of the parents, the camp school was closed as part of an effort on the part of either UNHCR or the Macedonian government to send the refugees back to Kosovo in 2000. Roki repeated some of the 4th grade during the few months the school was operating in 2000. He was able to study for a few months in Pretor in 2001, but from then until 2006 he was not able to attend any school.

Since moving to Šutka, Roki and Toni have been trying to find a school that will admit them. Roki has found this process extremely frustrating: “I try this and I try that and I try and I try and I try a hundred times but always nothing... I want one day to finish my school and have a job, I am trying in everything but nothing works.” After failing to gain admittance into several Macedonian primary schools, he tried applying to several expensive private American schools in 2005 and 2006. He included me in the application process by asking for recommendation letters testifying to his English proficiency. None accepted him.

For lack of better options Roki began attending some evening courses for adults and youth (ages 12-55) in February 2006 although it was his last resort, and he is very unhappy with his experiences there:

I didn't study for a long time after school in camp because I try many schools but they not accept me. This night school was my last possibility... One student was surprised that I speak English. He said I don't belong here. I said I know but what can I do? It is only school that will accept me.

He is staying with these courses for the time being because he feels that some education is better than none. He has hopes of gaining admittance to a better school soon.

Roki studies three subjects at the evening school: “reading and writing Macedonian Language, the Second one is Math, and the third is Biology.” However, Roki does not feel he is being challenged because “honestly I don't like the subjects they are teaching me because i know them, for example Macedonian, ohh my god, I am 7 years here.” As evidence, he showed me his homework and said “see, this is stupid, easy work [he had to list the rivers and lakes in Macedonia].” He feels belittled by the teacher who “ask me how much is 1 and 1 and other stupid question, they consider me without school.” Another reason Roki feels he is not sufficiently challenged is because his class

only meets “from 5-6:00pm when it’s summer. When it’s winter we study from 3-4:00pm to save electricity.” A third complaint regards the building and equipment: “The chairs are broken, equipments are a catastrophe. The school is very dirty with a lot of garbage.” Roki’s final complaint regards the classmates. The evening school

is not good for me because there is lot of people bad, teasing me ‘you are refugee ha ha ha, why you came here go back in Kosovo’, and the teacher ask me how much is 1 and 1 and more stupid questions. They consider me without school. But I answer them good, I say ‘I didn’t come to see you but because of war in Kosovo.’

His experience at this evening school has been a negative one but he plans to stay because “we must get diploma. This is the most important thing. We must go even if the school is bad. The beatings and the bad teacher don’t matter. The school is dirty, conditions are catastrophe but it’s OK if we get a diploma.”

In September 2006 Roki was in danger of losing this option for schooling as well because “the school is burned down.” He was worried because “it is my last possibility for school.” The school was rebuilt a month later, and the building “is better because it is not dirty like the old one.” However, “the teachers are same and there is no big changes nothing, just location and cleaning.” In October he started the 5th grade and in January 2007 he started the 6th (one grade per semester). If he also completes the 2007/2008 academic year at the evening school “then I will get my primary school diploma [8th grade], but then I will be 20 years old. it is long time and im too old.”

Roki is clearly unhappy with the education he is receiving at his “last possibility” school, and while he is becoming discouraged, he has not yet given up hope of finding an alternative way to graduate from school. He has recently been investigating online distance education. A practical possibility that Roki heard about was the vocational school Koco Racim. Roki felt that it offered a “very nice diploma because you can work

[practical vocational training]. You can learn for Profession, for example, Mahnical, Eletrical, hairdress, and other and some people get secondary diploma too.” He inquired and the school was ready to accept him, but he could not afford the tuition. He tried to “find donation, i was calling unicef for a help but they don't answer to me, I don't know Karen what I should do, i tried everything and nothing works.” This further discouraged him, but he still continues to be hopeful (“I will stay with the bad conditions and hope for normal school in the future”) and seek possibilities to continue his formal education.

Most of Roki's future aspirations at this point involve finishing school: “i must to finish school and to have diploma to be auto mecanic.” “I would like very much to finish [secondary] school and study at academy of music.” “I want to finish school and find work.” He always links school as important for finding meaningful work, although he is not yet leaning towards a particular career. He frequently changed his professional goals during the interviews citing auto mechanic, professor, musician, interpreter, lawyer, and electrician as professions he would one day like to have although he really is not sure. The only certainties in his future aspirations are to finish his education and help his family.

Toni's story

Until he was eleven, Toni lived in Žižkov, a small Albanian village not far from Priština. Like Roki, he grew up with Albanian friends because out of 600 houses there was “just one home Roma and that was just my family.” Unlike Roki, however, he has few good memories from his village before the war: “I remember from the village some Albanians were nice to Roma but some not nice. It was soo hard with them.” His Albanian classmates “wanted to fight me always” because “the teacher said how I was a

good student so others wanted to beat me up.” Edri, also present at this interview, agreed: “I couldn't make friend because the Albanians didn't like me and don't even talk to me. This is because I am Roma. The relationship with Albanians very bad, always teasing me everywhere I went.”

In 1998, the Azemins briefly escaped to Germany, but “got negative for asylum” and were deported back to Kosovo. They “had to come back two or three months before started the bombs in 1999. It was bad luck.” Toni was unwilling to talk much about the war and his feelings about it, other than to say “I was so scared.” Edri echoed the memory: “I remember when the bombing start, it was very hard. I didn't know what to do and I was so lost and afraid.” Toni was more willing to talk about his flight from Kosovo. When the bombing started in 1999, “my family became refugees” and spent many months fleeing from one place to another, leaving each refuge when it no longer felt safe. They first fled to nearby Kushmin village where they had cousins. They stayed there for three months. Then they moved to a refugee camp in Krusovec, Kosovo “when it was not safe in Kushmin anymore” and stayed another several months. Once they had the opportunity to escape Kosovo altogether, they did so and came to Camp Stenkovec in Macedonia. Toni remembers how he “walked the whole way to refugee camps, from Kosovo to Macedonia. It was so long. We walked to the border and stayed eight days on border.” They also spent a few months in a refugee camp near the town of Pretor in 2001 before returning to Camp Stenkovec in Šutka. The camp in Pretor was his only good memory of his flight from the war because the camp was located on the shores of a lake. Toni spent much of this time “swimming, playing football with my friends.” During this time “Roki and I had a good time in Pretor, really.”

Apart from 1999, the most traumatic year of Toni's life was 2003 when UNHCR shut down Camp Stenkovec, and the refugees went to the Greek border. Toni remembers that "the border was very, very hot with sun. We couldn't sleep. There was also so much raining and police fights." The twelve weeks Toni spent there were "very, very hard" on him. After their unsuccessful attempt to cross the border, Toni returned with all the refugees to Šutka and moved into a "rent house" with his family where he still lives today.

Toni was able to complete the third grade and some of the fourth when the war interrupted his schooling in 1999. Toni then briefly attended the same school as Roki in Camp Stenkovec in 2000. His experience there was not a good one because the school did not put him in the fourth grade, "they wanted us to repeat all classes but I didn't want to start again." There was also a school for the refugees in Pretor "but the school was the same- they wanted me to repeat the same homework." Toni "didn't like it" because he did not feel sufficiently challenged, and the school was not considering his individual needs. Upon returning to Camp Stenkovec in Šutka, he faced further obstacles to his education. Toni "tried to finish the diploma here, but they say we need diploma from old school to continue." However, Toni "didn't have diploma from Kosovo because I am refugee from war." By this time Toni felt he belonged in the 7th grade because it would be an age-appropriate level, he had been studying languages on his own, and he had done some schooling in refugee camps. However, his lack of transcripts presented one of many barriers in gaining admittance to a school in Šutka or Skopje. Toni: "I tried for seventh class but they want us to start from begin. We want them to test us but they change law and not allow it." He has tried contacting someone from his school in

Germany to see if they would send his transcripts. Although he only attended for a few months in elementary school, he feels that perhaps Macedonian schools would be impressed by a transcript from Germany, but so far he has had no luck in obtaining it.

By now Toni is “now not in regular school for six or seven years because of all this. Yes, I want to finish studies but for me there are not good options.” Toni and Roki together “tried everywhere to go to school” in both Šutka and Skopje. In their search they found “one possibility but many people doing drugs at this school and I didn’t want to be involved. It’s better to work.” The other possibility was the night school Roki currently attends. Here, Toni ran into the same problems he faced at the previous two refugee camp schools he attended. He “had to start from first class at night school because no diploma.” There were other problems with this school as well. Roki tried to convince him “to come in this school but he don’t want, I always ask him come in school, I can’t forcible take Toni in the school when he is not interesting” but Toni’s experience was too negative for him to continue:

I tried night school like Roki but I really, really don’t like. It’s dirty with garbage but I went because its important to get diploma. I went to night school for two or three weeks in 2006. It was not good. They have not good teaching and bad people. It is not good education. Why should I stay?

This was Toni’s last experience with schooling. Since then he has devoted more time to his part-time job and hobbies. While he still would like to finish his education, he is less active about exploring possibilities than Roki at this point. He felt that applying to the expensive American schools was futile but was very excited when he saw Roki researching online possibilities in the internet café. He joined us, asked many questions about the coursework, the tuition, and “is there a diploma with these courses? Is this diploma recognized?”

Nowadays Toni spends his time hanging out with his cousins and friends, practicing languages, working part-time in an internet café, and listening to music. He likes traditional Romani music, rock, and he sheepishly admitted to me that he listens to Albanian rap. He was embarrassed to reveal this information because “I know the Albanians want to chase us out but I still like some of their music.”

Toni’s internet job is important to him. He found it in 2005 through a family connection. His uncle’s boss owns an internet café and “needed someone who know about these things.” This job is a source of pride for Toni because “it’s good work and many Roma don’t have” and because “I trained myself to work with computers. It was hard at beginning but now it’s easy.” At this point in the conversation, Roki (also present out of curiosity and nosiness even though I was not interviewing him that day) verified Toni as the local computer expert: “If I or anyone else has some problems with computers, we go to Toni.”

In October 2006 Toni was transferred to another internet café where “it is much better” because “I am in the Centar of Šutka” and because “the computers are better, they are pentijum 4.” Toni is happy with his job but refuses to commit to it. When asked how long he will work there, he responded “hmm... I really don’t know about that. For so many reasons I don’t know.”

The topic of languages emerged as a natural ice-breaker to the interview with Toni. While discussing the logistics of his interview- where, when, and in what languages we should conduct it- the conversation turned enthusiastically to languages. Toni proudly told me he knows “Germany, English, Turkish, a little French, Serbish, Makedonish, Albanish, Romanes, and I try to read Arabic.” He speaks Romanes,

Albanian, and Serbian with native, or near native, fluency. He speaks Macedonian and German with a high level of fluency, and he can communicate quite well in English. Most of these languages play an important role in his life. He is learning Arabic “because I am Muslim and I want to learn to pray to God. I learn from the leader of Mosque.” He studies it regularly, although “Arabic is more difficult than German and English. English was easy for me. I can understand some but it’s very difficult to speak Arabic.” The language is still important for him, however. He is learning Turkish “because my cousin knows Turkish and teaches me” so that he can communicate with the local Turkish community. He has been studying English for most of his refugee experience since 1999 when “Paul Polansky asked me if I wanted to learn.” Polansky gave him some books, and he started watching cartoons in English. Toni is proud of the fact that “I was teacher of myself.” When he could not practice with Polansky or UNHCR workers, “I practiced together with Roki.” Nowadays he also practices English, Turkish, and German via internet with a number of contacts he has made. Studying languages and using languages is important for Toni because “the more languages I know the more I can contact with people.”

If Toni were still in Kosovo, he would like “to work like blacksmith. That is my favorite work” because he feels it is his rightful inheritance. Both “my father did this, my grandfather same, they had always work from this in Kosovo.” It is also possible that ancestors further back were blacksmiths as well. If the war had never happened, Toni would be a blacksmith apprentice now and laments the loss of opportunity to continue a family and Kovači tradition. However, he realizes that this is no longer a practical possibility because “it is not the same here like Kosovo.” He came from a rural

agricultural village with a demand for tools for small family farms. He now lives in an urban setting with little need for a blacksmith and no hope of returning to his former life.

Toni's future aspirations are to have a stable family life in a peaceful place: "My dream for future is not to have problems with people, to have my home where I belong, to have my family and be together, no wars, to have a girlfriend and then to have my own family." However, he has fewer ideas when it comes to a profession: "I want to have a good work but I don't know what." He is interested in computers but he really cannot say if they will lead to a lifelong career. The only thing he knows for certain is that he "would like to work for myself but also work to help my family."

Meori's story: A child's refugee experience and history with schooling

Meori was 15 years old in August 2006. While he is only three years younger than Roki and Toni, and could be considered a youth at this point, I have decided to offer his story as a child's perspective. I have done so because his refugee experience has been quite different from the older youth due mostly to his age. He has been a refugee for half his life and only has very vague memories of Kosovo. He was a small child during the war and flight from Kosovo and completed almost no schooling there. He has done most of his schooling as a refugee, while Toni and Roki did most of their schooling in Kosovo. As a result of his age, Meori was able to transition into a local Šutka school and is therefore much closer to being on track than either Toni or Roki. It is the difference in age that makes his experiences with school much different than theirs.

Meori's most vivid memory from his school in Kosovo is about his first grade teacher, whom he hated because "he just ordered us around and hit us with a stick when we didn't know. Osma was my worst teacher. He told my father I was not ready for

school because he didn't like us." But Meori felt he was "ready for learn. I say I can't wait to go to school!" He still harbors animosity towards Osma and told me that "some time later this teacher died and I think because he was bad to me." He was in the first grade at the time but was not able to complete the academic year in Kosovo due to the war. Meori was seven years old when the war started in 1999. Being young, he says that "I don't remember so much. I only remember start bombing, bombs falling from the sky. I was scared a lot."

Meori had mixed feelings about Camp Stenkovec: "The camp was good and bad. I liked the school in camp, but camp was dirty with strange people. I remember the garbage."¹⁴ When I asked him about the quality of the school, he interpreted the question differently and responded "I liked the camp school because I want to study a lot and I hoped I can finish school there." He was disappointed that "I only studied there for a short time" because "UNHCR closed down the school." He finished the first and half of the second grade at the camp school. Although the "teaching was catastrophe," he thought that the school was good simply because he likes school, and it was a chance for education after losing time in war. It was better than nothing so he was happy to be there. At this point Meori paused to think more about the school and reflected that "there were many, many problems." One problem was that "I didn't know much Macedonian" because they had just arrived from Kosovo at the time, and this was the only language of instruction. As a result, "in camp the teacher gave me bad grades. I had 1s and 2s [equivalent of Fs and Ds]." However, his most vehement complaint was about the attendance of the teachers who

¹⁴ The refugee camp was located next to the Šutka garbage dump.

sometimes could come and sometimes no. They came when they want. The teachers were not good because they weren't serious about teaching. If we wanted to learn today I remember my teacher always say 'wait, I want another coffee.' The students had to ask to start and we had only seven or eight or nine years.

During this time, Meori says he “learned a lot only because I study myself. I read a book about mathematics or something.” Meori felt schooling was important for his life during his time in camp and resented that the teaching itself was the major impediment to his learning. Most of his comments about his present and former schools are about the quality of the teaching and his memories of teachers.

Meori started the fifth grade in September 2006 at the Brakije Ramic School, the local Šutka primary school. He says “The school here is fine and much better than the camp school. The teaching is better, but in camp the teaching was catastrophe.” While a significant improvement, “there are still some bad things. Some kids wanted to beat me up and sometimes they tease the refugees” because “there is mostly Šutka Roma in this school and not so many refugees” to defend themselves. However, Meori is satisfied in general because “the most important for me is that the teaching is good in this school.” His favorite teacher ever was his fourth grade teacher last year because “She is the best. Her teaching is very nice and she is kind. She will walk me home sometimes and she remembers my birthday and shares coca-cola.” Meori especially likes her teaching in some subjects: “Olivera's teaching is very nice in Macedonian and mathematics so these are my favorites.” He also studies “mathematics, Macedonian language, nature, Macedonian government and culture, reading and writing, and not much history. I'm best at mathematics and Macedonian but I want to study all.”

At this point in the interview, Meori decided to prove to me that he is a good student by showing me his recent report cards where he has gotten a few 4s but mostly 5s

(equivalent of Bs and As), especially in math. Roki (who was interpreting) supported his claim of being a good student: “Meori is really very interested in school- more than he says. I often see him study for two hours after everyone is sleeping... and then he wakes up at 7 in morning to go for school and he is very happy.” My own experience in the three weeks I spent in Šutka was that Meori was the youth who would most often pester me for English and math lessons.

Meori is a few years behind in school because there was a gap from 2000-2003 when he didn’t have access to regular schooling. The UNHCR school closed in 2000, and then his family went to a refugee camp at Pretor Lake for a few months. He started the second grade again in 2003 after his family came back from the Greek border. Even though he is old for his grade, he was just young enough for the school to admit, unlike Roki and Toni. Since then he has been advancing regularly – 3rd grade in 2004/2005, 4th grade in 2005/2006, 5th grade in 2006/2007 at the age of 15. While he is a few years behind most of his classmates, he is not bothered by this. There are a few other refugees his age in his class, and the local Šutka Roma often start school late or take time off. Students in his school tend to range in age within each grade. Meori likes school and has no plans to drop out.

On the subject of languages, Meori also showed himself to be multilingual, although not to the degree of Toni and Roki: “I speak Romanes best, then Macedonian, then Albanian, and some Serb.” Since he left Kosovo in the first grade, he has not had much exposure to the latter two languages and “it would be difficult to study school in Albanian. No way Serb.” This is a big difference from Roki, who wrote his autobiography in Serbian because it is the language he feels most comfortable writing in

(Romanes is generally an oral language). However, Meori speaks Macedonian better than Toni, Roki, and the rest of his family because “I go to school here. Macedonian is only language I study in school now but its OK. I like Macedonian and it’s more useful for me.” He is excited because starting this year he “will study English in fifth class and it’s good because I can communicate with people, like Roki can.” The next time I come to Macedonia, he wants me to interview him in English. I think he was slightly frustrated that he needed an interpreter when neither Roki nor Toni did.

Community interviews and themes

This section addresses both issues and themes that arose out of conversations with the male youth and various family members, and provides insights from a variety of perspectives about the experiences of the male youth.

Šutka vs. Kovači attitudes to education One theme arising from the interviews was the relative importance of education among different groups of Roma, particularly the Kovači refugees from Kosovo and the local Šutka Roma. The refugees asserted that “we are something special among Roma, us Kovači... The Kovači Roma want education more than Šutka people” (Toni). According to Mimoza (Toni’s mother) “these Šutka Roma don’t care about education like us.” Hussein (Roki’s father) agreed that there is not much as value placed on education among the Macedonian Roma as their Kosovar Kovači community. He is disappointed by the fact that “in Šutka education is not important,” and no one has ambitions further than “to be a shopkeeper.”

Hussein claims there was ambition in his family. He proudly told me of the various professions in his extended family, and Roki filled in some of the blanks: “My First uncle is Mehanical, means fixing cars, and second, is barber, and the third is Osman,

he is translator for embassies. My uncles are educated like my father.” Hussein added his own successful career as an electrician.

Reflecting over his own schooling in Kosovo, Hussein is proud that “I have two diplomas. One is from school near Vršovice” and he “also studied to be electrician” in a vocational school. He commuted “very long distances” to study when he was young because “education was important to my family even though we lived in a small village.” He then had a successful career as an electrician for a large construction company in Kosovo until the war. Now he very occasionally finds work as a construction worker in Šutka (and teaches Roki the trade) but says “it is not enough work for my family.” They have been supported by UNHCR since 1999 but are not sure how long that will continue.

When asked what he would like for his children, he became very emotional and told me “the chance for education and a good life. I am sorry they can’t finish their education like I did. This is really the most difficult thing for me.” He told Roki “I will be very happy when you will get in school, you should go to the night school if you can't get in normal” because some education is better than none. He is frustrated by the lack of educational opportunities in Šutka, for Roki in particular, because “Roki is very intelligent and there is no possibility to study here. It is a shame he can’t get good education.” He feels his son is being wasted. Hussein repeated this sentiment many times throughout his interviews. His biggest disappointment about being stuck in Macedonia is not being able to provide “a good education for my sons” because the “situation in Macedonia is very bad for education, for future.” Since he himself was able to study and learn a trade in Kosovo, he especially hates that his sons are having difficulty securing their futures in this way. Roki emphatically agreed that this was the

worst thing about their situation. Osmi shared their sentiments: “like anyone, I want my children to have a good education and a future.”

Gender issues (marriage and girls’ schooling) While the focus of this study is the experiences of male refugee youth, it is also important to give voice to the girls of this community because they have their own unique experiences and are perhaps even more invisible than their male counterparts. I chose to focus on male youth because I had more access to them and they are less shy, so I got to know them first. Also, they generally speak more English. As a result, I was able to keep in touch with Roki and Toni by email from 2003 to 2006 and get to know them quite well. I did not keep in touch with any of their sisters because they do not have email accounts or high levels of English. The girls were quite shy around me at first, especially when male relatives were also in the room. As time went on, they opened up to me and gave me dance lessons, taught me to cook a couple of their dishes, encouraged me to cook mine, taught me some Romanes, and demanded English and Spanish lessons of me because “English is useful” and Gavdije told me “yo quiero aprender espanol mejor [I want to learn Spanish better].” They know more English than I first realized (they rely on their brothers to translate even when they do not need a translator), and I was surprised that they know some Spanish. It has become the secret language of young women because they have been watching Venezuelan soap operas for years. They use it as a secret language when they want neither their parents nor brothers to understand. The longer I was in Šutka and the more I interacted with them without men around, the more the young women surprised me. I

realized they had unique experiences and stories that were worth hearing and would be worth studying in the future.¹⁵

I had a focus group with Sanela (age 24 in August 2006), Antonela (22) and Gavidije (20) because they said they preferred to be interviewed together. They are all Roki's older sisters. Their oldest sister Sadeta (28) is the only one who is married. Their single status seemed odd to me at first because I never met another unmarried Romani woman over the age of twenty outside of this family. Also, the family found it strange that I myself am single. Since they questioned me about this, I thought it was fair to question them in return. When I asked Gavidije if she was looking to get married, she replied "no way!" because "I don't want to leave my family" and because "my life is better here." All three sisters agreed they are happy to remain single for now and "stay with the family." The three sisters saw how they were separated from their oldest sister Sadeta, who was married quickly during the war and escaped with her husband's family to Germany as asylum seekers (they have not received refugee status either). They have not seen her for seven years or met her three young children.

The sisters seemed surprised that I wanted to know about them but were happy to share their experiences with school and family. The three oldest sisters – Sadeta, Sanela, and Antonela – all were able to finish primary school in Kosovo before the war. Gavidije finished the fourth grade along with Roki. Since then she has only briefly attended the school at Camp Stenkovec but has not finished the fifth grade.

¹⁵ The unmarried daughters all seemed reserved, protected, and shy around male relatives but their outlets become apparent once admitted to their confidence. The best example I saw of this was in their belly dancing. Every girl over the age of 15 claimed to be too shy to dance when any male relative was around. But if they felt like dancing, they would secretly gather all interested women, lock themselves in a room and belly dance for hours.

All the sisters agreed with Sanela's statement that "I like to study." They have fond memories of their school, and all claim to have good grades. They wished they could show me their report cards as proof but they were lost in the war in Kosovo. Nowadays they occasionally study English and Spanish on their own by reading some of Roki's beginner level English textbooks or writing down vocabulary from Spanish language television. They took advantage of my stay in their home in August by asking me questions about both languages and asking for lessons in the afternoons.

Female Roma refugees face additional barriers to education. Not only were their lives interrupted by the war but Roma girls have much lower levels of education than boys. Both in Kosovo and in Macedonia, the Kurteshi sisters live in societies that do not expect them to obtain an education beyond primary school. Attending an all-Albanian school was also an obstacle for the sisters. Although they liked studying, they had to leave after the 6th grade because at this point they would feel unsafe walking home from school. Their Albanian classmates "want to fight us and it was dangerous. We were sad to leave" (Antonela). Sanela felt unsafe at school as well because "other students threw spitballs at me because I was good in Serbian and the Albanian students didn't like people who speak Serbian." She dropped out of the seventh grade soon after this and feels that "this was a big discrimination to me."

Family unity Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of family unity. After discovering that I do not live with my family, Hussein (Roki's father), Mimoza (Toni's mother) and Omer (Roki and Toni's uncle) wanted me to interview them about their family ties so that I could understand their culture. This interview became important to them during a picnic after Toni, amused by the shock

value, took advantage of a lull in conversation to announce to his and Roki's entire extended families that "Karen lives 9000 km from her parents." This information was met with gasps of shock and disbelief. Mimoza rebuked me with disapproval: "Do you miss them? How can you do this? Your mother must miss you!" Omer asserted that "No, no, it is not good to live separate. It is important for our family to stay together." Their children could not imagine separation either: "I could never leave my family" (Edri), "I don't want to leave my family" (Gavdije), "I will never leave my father, no way, not after what we went through together" (Toni). Wherever the uncertain future may take him, Roki asserts "my situation depends of UNHCR, I don't know do they will send me back or somewhere out of this country, but what happens, I am not leaving my family, because you know in which situation we are, no way."

This bond extends not only to immediate family members but the extended family as well. This makes it doubly difficult to emigrate to a new place. They are willing to scatter for the sake of their children's education. However, this must be excruciating as family ties are so close. According to Toni,

Roki and I, we always help each other and we want to stay together. Now we are 18 together. If in one year Roki goes to one place and I go to another it will be very bad. It would be best if our families can go together to Canada. We are going through so much together.

They feel they cannot stay in Šutka because there is "no work, no education, no life," according to Hussein.

Roki enjoyed talking about his family relationships and wanted to make sure that I came away with a positive view of their family bonds:

When I come from music practice my mum ask me 'are you hungry or how was the practice today, do you learn today any new song?' We have nice relationship. I love her and she loves me. My relationship with my father is very nice too because sometimes he is teaching me a lot things like electric stove and how to make houses you know. I am going with him when he needs help and we work together. With my sisters I have good relationship too. Sometimes we playing, sometimes going walking in Skopje and have good day. Sometimes we get hate each others, but

not so bad. I have one brother and he is very nice. We play games like Playstation and I help him sometimes with schoolwork, and we racing with cars game who will win, it is nice with him. I have big family and I am protected.

His fondest memories are reserved for his oldest sister, Sadeta, who he has not seen since 1999:

my best memories when I was a kid when my oldest sister looked after me, and I cant forget that never, my relationship with her was nice, when I come from school she is helping me some things, and now believe me I am missing her alot.

Resistance to representation One theme common in several interviews with the youth and some family members was the notion of representation, both of the Roma and refugees. Various family members expressed frustration in the ways they are portrayed by non-Roma. They also engaged with and found ways to manipulate their images.

While passing city hall one day, Roki told me “this municipality is invisible to me. The mayor doesn’t want to help the refugees.” He then told me he had had a run in with him in a shop, which had left a bad impression because he was speaking English to a UNHCR worker in the shop. The mayor, who had been listening for a couple of minutes, expressed surprise and told Roki that he didn’t look like a refugee. Roki looked frustrated while recounting this story and exclaimed “what does a refugee look like?” His frustration stemmed from having assumptions made about him, and he resented the representations about refugees that led the mayor and others to make those assumptions.

Most of the Roma refugees I spoke with resented most images of themselves taken through the eyes of a ‘gadjo’ (‘foreigner’ in Romanes). The strongest examples I noticed were in discussions about the recent mockumentary “The Šutka Book of Records” directed by Aleksandar Manic in 2005 about the Roma in Šutka. It was made in the style of a documentary, detailing the lives and fierce competitive natures of several Šutka inhabitants, although it is a fictional story. One review describes the film is:

a madcap, yet deeply humanistic documentary film which celebrates the idiosyncratic characters that make up Shutka, a small Macedonian town which is home to the largest Roma (Gypsy) community in the world... The Shutka Book of Records has quickly gained a cult following and the press honoured it by calling it one of the best films ever made about the Roma (7th Art review).

When I expressed curiosity about this movie, mostly because there was such a discrepancy between Rom and non-Rom attitudes towards it, Toni invited me to his house to watch the movie and see for myself why it was so emotive for them. I watched it together with his family who all agreed vehemently with Roki when he told me that “it is not a good picture of the Roma.” He described it as:

very stupid, I don't like it because it is not good picture of [image of] the Roma. It is bad picture, because there is some naked children in the street, walking dirty and poor, and other very bad things. I don't like that movie, but it is popular because there is some funny things.

His vehemence about the movie was due to the negative portrayal of Roma and a fear that the audience would reinforce their prejudices by linking the images of the dirty children in the streets with all Roma. Roki did not see himself reflected on that screen. Part of his emotional reaction was in indignation for his community, but it was also personal. He is reminded of the difficulty of succeeding in a world which views him in such ways.

Another example of resentment of negative images would be the books of Paul Polansky, an American who has been working with Roma communities throughout Eastern Europe. He occasionally writes books of poetry and fills them with the imagery and images of the poverty and misery the Roma suffer at the hands of the Albanians, the Serbs, and especially the United Nations. His books are usually met with horror by the people they depict (“Why does he only show the bad things? This is very bad picture of the Roma” -Mimoza), and he frequently has to explain that he needs to do this in order to mobilize people in the United States, to make them feel pity in order to donate money

because pity can be a useful emotion¹⁶. These images are not met unanimously with horror. Roki himself uses Polansky's tactic. He asked me to take pictures of his school, a tin shack with broken windows and surrounded by garbage, and "show it to people in America" so that someone might know about his plight with education and help him and so "people can see how it is for refugees like me."

While in Šutka I was asked repeatedly "not to take pictures, please" (Toni). I think perhaps there was a fear I would depict or objectify them in negative or exotic ways. Perhaps I would have; I'm not sure. I found myself eager in the first few days to photograph markets and weddings. I wanted pictures of the beautiful dresses, the women dripping in gold, the dancing, and the bands. I suppose I also would have looked for the poverty. After all, I was researching refugee education, and I was looking for images that are usually associated with refugees. When I met this family in 2003, I did precisely that. I took pictures of the refugee camp, of the helplessness and misery, and of the garbage dump the camp was built next to. After several reprimands that I should not take pictures during this visit, I handed my camera over to the family and anyone else who wanted to use it. When I took pictures, I only did so at the request of a community member. In this way, the Roma refugees of Šutka represented themselves as they chose, as they saw themselves and perhaps as they wanted me to remember them. I now have hundreds of pictures of Roma posing with their families in their living rooms or having picnics, newlyweds in gold, mothers and daughters cooking, children being silly, teenagers wearing sunglasses and being 'cool', and more family members together in the living rooms. All images of how the Roma in this community see themselves and which I might have missed if I had only been looking at poverty or other stereotypes through the

¹⁶ See appendices for an example of Polansky's poetry.

lens of my camera. This was perhaps the best example I saw of the Roma refugees creating images of themselves for an outsider, images based on identities of ‘family member’ and ‘Kovaci’ rather than ‘refugee.’¹⁷

¹⁷ See the *Shifting Identities* section for more information.

CHAPTER FIVE.

WHAT AFFECTS THE EDUCATION OF THE ROMA REFUGEE YOUTH?

The next two chapters discuss the findings of this study. They include a discussion of factors affecting education for the refugee youth, and a discussion of what education means to the refugee youth. Chapter five looks at the unending limbo period, shifting identities and obstacles the refugee youth are facing – all factors that shape the environment in which they live and seek an education. Chapter six explores the refugees' attitudes to education, including the notions of education as stability, education as agency and education as an investment for an uncertain future.

Obstacles

Refugees “are often among the most academically successful students in their host communities” (Mosselson, 2007, p.98). However, they may often find themselves resettled in places and in schools where they are “at an academic, social, and emotional disadvantage” (Mosselson, 2007, p.95) because their needs are not met. Despite being motivated students, refugees face all sorts of barriers and obstacles to obtaining a satisfactory education (Jones & Rutter, 1998). Jones and Rutter find that refugees face these challenges: adjusting to an unfamiliar school system, adjusting to a different culture and expectations, and learning a new language for survival and school instruction. However, their findings were based on research conducted in the UK and do not apply neatly to the context of Roma refugees. Roki and Toni have had very little difficulty with the last challenge; they are linguistically gifted and were exposed to many languages at a young age. When they first arrived in Macedonia, they say it took very little time to learn Macedonian and Macedonian Romanes as both are very similar to Serbian and Kovači

Romanes. While they might ideally like to study in Romanes (“I would like to study in roma but you can't because in Macedonia not exist roma school, just Macedonian” - Roki), they have no expectations of being able to do so. Also, the refugee youth are sufficiently fluent in Macedonian so as not to be linguistically hindered at school. Jones and Rutter’s first two challenges apply better in this context, but they are compounded with others.

Youth in their late teens in this community have faced serious obstacles to completing their educations. Most had some basic schooling in Kosovo before 1999 but the war interrupted the schooling of most youth at various stages of primary school. They have already missed out on many formative years and are reaching the age when they are expected to contribute to family earnings. Roki and Toni have been facing a number of obstacles to completing their schooling in Šutka, only some of which apply to Meori. The obstacles include: lack of documentation from former schools, age inappropriateness for formal schools, lack of non-formal options for adults, lack of legal residency, discrimination by Macedonian society of both Roma and refugees, expectation to begin working and contributing to the family income, societal expectations, cultural adjustments, lack of knowledge about the Macedonian education system, and a lack of help navigating this education system. It is the combination of all these barriers that is making it so difficult for them.

Table 2. Summary of the refugees' schooling history

Name age in war/ age in 2006	1998 in Kosovo	1999 bombing March - June	2000 in Šutka camp	2001 in Pretor camp	2002 back in Šutka camp	2003 went to Greek border/ camp closed/ moved to rent houses in Šutka	2004 in Šutka	2005 in Šutka	2006 evening school burned down in Oct/ threats of deportation	2007 still in Šutka/ continued threats of deportation
Meori 8/15	Started 1 st grade	War interrupted 1 st grade	Part of 2 nd in Šutka camp	Part of 2 nd in Pretor camp	No school	No school	Finished 2 nd , started 3 rd in Šutka school	Finished 3 rd , started 4 th	Finished 4 th , started 5 th	Still in 5 th grade
Roki 11/18	Finished 4 th grade, started 5 th	War interrupted 5 th grade	Part of 4 th in Šutka camp	Part of 4 th in Pretor camp	No school	No school	Searching for schools	Searching for schools	Finished 4 th & 5 th at evening school (last resort)	Still in 6 th
Toni 11/18	Finished 3 rd grade, started 4 th	War interrupted 4 th grade	Part of 1 st in Šutka camp	Part of 1 st in Pretor camp	No school	No school	Searching for schools	Searching for schools	Started 1 st at evening school	No school/ works in internet cafe
Edri 13/20	Finished 5 th grade, started 6 th	War interrupted 6 th grade	Part of 1 st in Šutka camp	Part of 1 st in Pretor camp	No school	No school	Searching for schools	Searching for schools	Started 1 st at evening school	No school/ works painting houses

The following section further describes their specific barriers to education and schooling history, such as why Toni and Edri had to repeat the first grade and why Meori was the only refugee youth to transition smoothly into a local school in 2004:

Transcripts The obstacle that the refugees themselves identify as their biggest barrier is their lack of documentation from former schools. Most refugees fled Kosovo during the war without any possessions, including transcripts. Many schools in Skopje refuse to accept students without transcripts or documentation. Toni is facing this situation since he does not “have diploma from Kosovo because I am refugee from war.” He attributes his rejections from various schools in Skopje and Šutka to the fact that: “I try to get in but they asked me about diploma, and I did not have it with me, so it was very bad. Nobody helped me to get in school because I did not have my old Diploma from my school in Kosovo.” Toni repeats this frustration many times during his

interviews: “I can’t get into a good school because I don’t have diploma from old school. They won’t let me in.”

Unlike Toni and many other refugees, Roki did manage to flee Kosovo with his transcripts. However, he has had some problems with them: “I will show you documents from Albanian school in Kosovo so you can see the big discrimination they did to me. I finished class 4 but they say only 3.” Roki then showed me the transcripts and explained how he was only given credit for some of the subjects he studied. He remembers “studying Albanian history. I was good in this subject. I know all about Skanderberg¹⁸ but they say I didn’t study it.”

The youth themselves have identified a solution to their lack of transcripts: assessment. Roki asserts that “first, if we don’t have diploma then we need to make test to let them know in which class we belong. We have right to testing to see how much we are educated and have everything we need for the school.” This is an issue especially important for Toni because he “tried for seventh class but they want us to start from begin” because he had no transcripts. He then added bitterly, “we want them to test us but they change law and not allow it.” When Toni can get into a school he cannot start from the grade level where he belongs, further frustrating him.

Age More obstacles facing the refugee youth are age inappropriateness for formal schools and a lack of quality non-formal options for adults. Roki and Toni have experienced being refugees at an overlooked age where they never seemed to fit well in the education system, unlike Meori. The difference between them is age. As a child, Meori was able to transition easily into the Šutka education system and is only a couple years behind most of his classmates. As slightly older youth, Roki and Toni faced barrier

¹⁸ Albanian national hero who fought against the Turks in the 15th century

after barrier in a society that does not understand their need for schooling. The obstacle of lack of transcripts is then compounded by another: age.

Roki, Toni, and Meori experienced only sporadic schooling from 1999 to 2003 and none were able to complete an entire grade during this period. At the end of this four-year period, only Meori was able to transition into the local Šutka primary school and continue where he had left off. By that time, the schools considered Roki and Toni too old. This prolonged and complicated their admission to a school. The more time that went by, the more difficult it became. As time goes by, the refugees fall farther and farther behind. Students several years older than their classmates no longer ‘fit in.’ Not only would the students feel uncomfortable, but primary and secondary schools are reluctant to admit eighteen year olds who belong in the fifth grade or sixteen year olds who belong in the second, for example. Roki took me to meet the admissions coordinator of one school to which he was applying. She explained that her school could not admit someone so much older than the children in his grade level. Nor could her school offer a “social promotion” and put him in an age appropriate grade without transcripts.

The problem with not finishing primary school on track is that there is no quality adult education program in their area into which they would fit. There was an adult basic education school (1st to 8th grade) in Šutka until a few months ago, however, both Roki and Toni complained that the quality of the education was terrible; it consisted of a poorly constructed tin shack next to a garbage dump and was closed for some time because it recently burned down.

Age becomes a more insuperable barrier as time goes on for another reason. The refugee youth have already missed out on many formative years and are reaching the age

when they are expected to take on increased responsibilities in the family, either by working and contributing to the family income or by helping to run the household. This has been a barrier only in the recent past and is likely to become a greater obstacle as time goes on and the youth get older and give up the search for an education. Toni has already done so. He has mostly traded in searching for schools for a part-time job. Roki, on the other hand, has not yet given up. Toni, Edri, and Roki are all starting to feel family responsibility and take this into account in their future aspirations. Toni would not only “like to work for myself but also work to help my family.” Edri recently started “working with my father so I can help my family.” Roki feels he “must to help my father and my mother, because they will get old they will not be able to work anymore so I must to work.” In August he was lamenting the loss of a temporary translating job for UNHCR. He was considered for the position but not ultimately chosen, he claims because of nepotism and UNHCR politics. He was frustrated because “this work paid almost 300 Euros. I wanted this work to help support my family.” The idea of ‘helping their families’ is always present in their lives and their decisions about their futures. As their priorities shift and this sense of family responsibility increases along with their ages, they become more and more likely to substitute work for school, or the search for school.

Societal expectations/cultural adjustments Adjusting to a different culture and societal expectations (Jones and Rutter’s second challenge) has proven somewhat challenging for the refugee youth. They went from small villages where they were very few Roma, but where they were accepted and mixed with Albanians until 1999, to a larger Roma town. While a minority in Macedonia as a whole, Roki and Toni no longer associate with anyone who is not Roma in a meaningful way: “I don’t have friends

macedonian, but they look very nice persons” (Toni). In Kosovo they were in villages where the Albanians knew them and accepted them, but now few Macedonians do the same. Roki and Toni are now Roma living in a Roma town but their refugee status makes them outsiders within the Roma community. They have had to leave their homes and learn to operate in an ethnically segregated world, learn where they are not welcome, and learn to live with the label of refugee. Although Roki uses the word “refugee” to describe himself, he also explains how this label negatively affects him. Other Roma invoke the label “refugee” in order to differentiate him at his night school, for instance. To the Macedonians the refugees are now residents of Šutka, a town associated with negative Roma stereotypes. Therefore, society’s expectations are low, and extra efforts are not made to provide them with a quality education. Education levels of Roma are much lower than those of Albanians, Serbs or Macedonians. While nearly all Macedonian children finish primary school, only 50% of Macedonians Roma do so. Only 11.6% of Roma over the age of 15 have finished secondary school (McDonald, 2006). As a result, the refugee youth live in an environment that does not expect them to finish school and attain a high level of education (“These Šutka Roma don’t care about education.” –Mimoza). On top of all these external societal and cultural factors, they are trying to find an education while dealing with their internal feelings regarding the trauma of war, resettlement and uncertainty.

Lack of legal residency The refugees feel they are in a temporary limbo in Šutka and are therefore reluctant to establish permanent roots. It is possible this transitory status has had an impact on their access to schooling: “I had problems with my status in

Macedonia, because they [various schools] said to me, ‘we can not accept you, you don't have normal status in Macedonia, I don't know how long you will be here’” (Toni).

Unrealistic expectations/lack of help navigating the education system The refugee youths’ most serious hurdle is Jones and Rutter’s first challenge, adjusting to a new school system. Schools need to include certain things to accommodate refugee students: language support that enables them to fulfill their academic potential, psychosocial and emotional support, encouraging tolerance and understanding among all students in order to provide a welcoming school environment (Jones & Rutter, 1998). As a first step however, Roki and Toni need access to a school. There has been no support to help them navigate the Macedonian education system nor the application and admittance process, and they therefore cannot access a quality education. Despite

their heterogeneity, the vulnerability of their circumstances and the crucial educational stage at which they arrive, young refugees share a set of common and urgent needs: for effective and accessible educational advice and guidance, for initial/diagnostic assessment as a basis for establishing continuity between previous education and current/future learning programmes, and for specific kinds of support to assist them in being able to resume, reconstruct, or even, in some cases, to begin their educational careers (McDonald, 1998, p.151).

Unfortunately, none of the UN agencies working with this community had any mechanism to help students navigate the Macedonian education system when they arrived from Kosovo. As temporary asylum seekers, it was assumed they would be temporary, that a solution would present itself and the refugees could go back or find asylum elsewhere. After eight years, they are still in that temporary asylum seeking limbo and hope for such a solution is waning. UNHCR set up a school for the refugees when they were in the camp, but it has not existed for over six years. Roki gives an example of their lack of help: “UNICEF doesn’t help the refugees with school because they just giving bags and books, but I think there more things that refugees need.” If

given the chance, Roki would like to tell UNHCR “that I don't feel free here [in Macedonia], and what about my education? You don't help me.”

Since there is no refugee school nor any help navigating the education system (or any help that the refugees recognize as benefiting their lives), Roki is trying to navigate the admissions process himself. Toni was doing so as well, but has now given up. The confidence and know-how to be able to navigate a new education system are unlikely to be among the competencies of refugees if they do not receive assistance in these matters. Without proper access to well-informed and up-to-date guidance, they will remain at a disadvantage in the education system (McDonald, 1998). This is assistance Roki and Toni have not received. Roki does not have much knowledge of the application process. He does not know how to get applications or fill them out or what to do in an interview. When he sent an email to the Nova American School asking for admission, “they think that I kidding with them because I write to them without saying my name so I was fault about this, then I write to them I am very sorry I am Roki from Kosovo I live in Macedonia as a refugee.”

Also, he is setting his sights on unrealistically expensive and exclusive private schools, such as the Nova American School and the American International School of Skopje. In fact, he has become very resolute about gaining admittance to one of these. He has tried applying to Nova three times, had me write a recommendation letter, and brought me to their admissions to lobby on his behalf. He says he is applying to these schools because “if I get in American high school, I think they [UNICEF] will help me [with tuition expenses]” but this does not seem very likely to me. Roki recently found one school that would take him. It is a vocational school for adults without secondary

school degrees. He was referred there by the admissions coordinator of the Nova American School. At first, he was disappointed that he would have to attend a Macedonian school instead of an American one, but then was excited that he had a possibility that would accept him and train him for a career. However, he could not register this fall because the tuition for one semester is over \$300 and he could not get sufficient donations from UNICEF. It is therefore unrealistic to expect that UNICEF would pay his tuition at one of the American Schools, which charge over \$3,000 for one year of tuition.

The lack of help the refugees have received in navigating the Macedonian education system has been a significant barrier for them. In Toni and Edri's case, they became frustrated and are no longer making much effort to find a school. In Roki's case, he has been disillusioned with public Macedonian schools and is now resolute on attending a private American school, an unrealistic goal for financial reasons. Roki's new and unrealistic expectations (he switched from looking for a Macedonian school to an American one in 2005) provide an extra barrier for him.

Disillusionment Although disillusionment with school is perhaps a product of the other barriers Roki and Toni are facing, it can also be a barrier in itself. Once the youth are disillusioned due to the other factors, they are more likely to give up their search for school. Toni has already done so, and Roki is extremely frustrated with his evening school and lack of better options: "I try this and I try that and I try and I try and I try a hundred times but always nothing."

Toni's last experience with schooling was at the evening school, which he felt "was not good. They have not good teaching and bad people. It is not good education.

Why should I stay?” Since then he has devoted more time to his part-time job and hobbies. It is still evident that he would like to complete his education given the chance. He was enthusiastic about researching online courses and is frustrated with the barriers that prevented him from completing his schooling. While he still would like to finish his education, he is less active about exploring possibilities than Roki at this point. He is more disillusioned than Roki and also has a job he finds interesting. Even though studying would be ideal, he has come to terms (more than Roki) with his situation and is happy and proud of his job. Roki’s experience at the evening school has also been a negative one:

I am now in one night school but it is not good for me because there is lot of people bad, teasing me ‘you are refugee ha ha ha, why you came here go back in Kosovo’, and the teacher ask me how much is 1 and 1 and more stupid questions. They consider me without school. But I answer them good, I say ‘I didn't come to see you but because of war in Kosovo.’

He is being stigmatized because of his refugee status, and he is receiving a substandard education. While Roki is still attending the evening school, he is often pessimistic about the opportunities this school will lead to in the future. He informed me that “the diploma from night school is not good because you can’t use it to go up and study more.” It offers a terminal primary school diploma that is neither prestigious nor recognized by secondary schools.

The fact that he is not getting the education he wants is reflected in the differences between his future hopes and what he thinks will most likely happen to him in the future. He hopes he can one day leave Macedonia and have a successful career (as a mechanic, professor, translator, musician or lawyer), but he is becoming disillusioned about doing so. He hopes he can get an education but is increasingly pessimistic: “I don't think that I

will be one day profesor or auto mecanic, because I lost alot time, i must to finish school and to have diplom to be auto mecanic, but I don't have it.”

Roki has tried to reduce Toni and Edri’s advanced level of disillusionment with formal education:

I was telling to Toni to come in this school but he don’t want. I always ask him come in school, but I can’t forcible take him in the school when he is not interesting. It’s not something that I want but it’s important to be educated. Toni and Edri tried this school only after I asked and asked them.

However, neither Toni nor Edri was willing to put up with conditions they felt were appalling (“It’s dirty with garbage” and “they have not good teaching”) and dropped out soon after. After this interview, they took me to visit the school so I could see “how I must to study” (Roki), and I understood Toni’s reluctance. The school consisted of five tin shacks with broken windows, and the outside was covered in garbage.

The difference between Roki and Toni is that, although he is frustrated with his current evening school and his search for better options, Roki plans to “stay with the bad conditions and hope for normal school in the future” even though “we have no choice to go to normal school directly.” Toni, on the other hand, believes that “it is better to work” than to get a sub-par education. While he feels that “yes, I want to finish studies but for me there are not good options,” he has cut his losses and resigned himself to providing his own education and entering the world of work without a diploma. At this point, only a quality option would entice Toni back to school.

Permanent temporariness of unending limbo and uncertain futures

Unending limbo Since experiencing a traumatic rupture in their lives in 1999, the refugees have become a part of what Appadurai calls the global flow of ‘ethnoscape’ or the “landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists,

immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers and other moving groups and persons which constitute an essential feature of the world, and appear to affect the politics of and between nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (Appadurai, 1999, p.3). Appadurai classifies all these as “moving groups.” However, there are important distinctions between the power dynamics their movements carry. Some of these groups have the resources to choose their travels and come and go more or less as they please. Some experience a rupture in their lives and go where they must. Since experiencing this dramatic move, the Roma refugees of Šutka have been exposed to new worldviews and ways of life, but they are caught in a seemingly unending period of legal limbo. The refugees feel transient, but without a solution in sight. They feel permanently temporary. This limbo is important to address because it has shaped their refugee experience since they became refugees in 1999 (they have yet to receive asylum and resettle permanently) and has thus shaped much of their attitudes and access to education.

This limbo period is a stressful one that compounds the trauma of war because the future is uncertain (Mosselson, 2006; Suarez-Orozco, 1989). Being sent back to Kosovo, staying in Macedonia, or being granted asylum in another country are the possibilities but none are looming on the horizons. Therefore Roki and Toni feel temporary and transient in a country where they have spent eight years and much of their youth, even though it is possible they will stay for many more years.

The Roma refugees made a painful break with Kosovo and are now living for a yet unknown international future (“It will be nice if I can go other country because I think will be more better than here in Macedonia.” -Toni “My wish is to go somewhere where can I have good life to live, and finish school, for example in your country or Swiss.” -

Roki). Although they have no immediate means of leaving, their future plans hinge on leaving Macedonia both to escape the interminable limbo period, and because “in shutka is very difficult to find job, because Macedonia is very poor country. Most of the roma are not working” (Roki). They do not see a viable future in Macedonia even if their families were granted legal refugee status. Dreams for the future are dependent on leaving.

It seems that the most difficult part of their situation lies in the present – a time of limbo in terms of settling, education, work, etc. with no end in sight. A UNICEF employee who was working with the refugees in Šutka once told me “you know, these refugees have it OK here.” By this I think she meant that they are no longer in a camp, have a house, have food. They are perhaps better off materially than other refugees she has seen or made assumptions about. However, it is not their material conditions which make the refugees are unhappy. What is frustrating them is the lack of control over their lives, the fact that major decisions about themselves are in the hands of UNHCR and other internationals, the fact that their careers and educations are on hold while those decisions continue to not be made.

One frustration resulting from the refugees’ permanent temporariness is revealed in their attitudes towards their ‘rent houses’ (the houses they moved into after the refugee camp was closed in 2003). When complimented on his lovely home, Hussein, who had built his own home in Kosovo when he got married, replied sadly “it is not my house- only rent house.” UNHCR is providing them with living expenses in Šutka for the time being. Roki also resents the rent house:

UNHCR he still helps but one day he will leave us and we will not have anymor help from him, they are helping us to pay the rent house, Electric, water food and thats all... but you know how is when you don't have your own house you understand?... I like the house, but better is the camp,

but there is no way that we can go back to camp. Camp is destroyed all and there is a big Garbage there. But in that camp was better than in Rent House.

Roki does not lament the physical conditions of the camp or his new home in Šutka, but the fact that they are in limbo and under the protection of UNHCR. Despite the fact that the rent house is larger and more comfortable than their camp accommodations, the Kurteshis preferred living in the refugee camp. The refugees resented leaving the camp so much that they fled to the Greek border rather than assimilate into Šutka because this signaled that the temporary limbo was becoming a permanent purgatory. The refugees felt that this was UNHCR's way of postponing and prolonging a solution even though "UNHCR must find our solution because they are responsibility for us." They felt a solution where they could resettle and be independent was further away with this move. Even though their conditions are materially better in the rent house, there is more frustration and less hope. For Roki, being in Macedonia is a mixed blessing. It is better than Kosovo but worse than a third country: "It is good for me that I am not anymore afraid, I am free, and my family is with me, nobody is killed from my family, but it is bad we don't have our own house and we don't have work or school, that is bad."

This period of limbo is frustrating for the refugees because they have lost their homes and past lives, they do not feel welcome or settled in Macedonia, and they have no immediate or apparent means to change their situation. In other words, they feel they have no past, no present, and no future. Although they miss their old life in Kosovo, the refugees have made a painful break with the past:

About my village I miss it a lot. It was very nice in School in Kosovo. And my parents miss Kosovo like I. But now we forget it, we can't go back. I must say what is truth, we can't go back never because if we are going in Vršovice then they will kill us (Roki).

Roki no longer associates Kosovo with his future in any way and is living and planning entirely for an unpredictable future. Roki is a little bit nostalgic about his home in Kosovo, but he is attempting to be pragmatic about the past. He feels he has lost it and can never go back to Kosovo nor back to his life when there was no ethnic hatred. Instead of dwelling on a past he is certain he can never reclaim, he is fiercely determined to make plans for the future, although in his pessimistic moments he feels he will never achieve them. Toni is perhaps more nostalgic for Kosovo: "I wish we were in Kosovo now. We would finish school at this age and have diploma." If he were still in Kosovo and the war had never happened, he would ideally like "to work like blacksmith" in order to continue a family tradition. His desire to be a blacksmith is a lament for the loss of his life in Kosovo and the adult life we would have inherited there. He realizes that blacksmithing is no longer a practical possibility and names other interests, like computers, but is still sad about losing the chance to carry on a family tradition.

The present is frustrating for the refugees because "there is no life here in Macedonia, no education, no work, no future" (Hussein). While "it is more nice to be in macedonia than in Kosovo, Macedonia don't accept us to be their Nationality" (Edri) so they do not feel as if they can establish permanent roots.

So what i want, is how to find the way to get from this shit Macedonia, because i am not stable here, you will never know what is going to change tomorrow. I mean i want one day have my personal home and try to finish my school and have a job (Roki).

These are things Roki feels he cannot do while stuck in limbo. In the meantime, he is "trying in everything but nothing works, i mean about my situation." Having broken with the past and become very frustrated with the present, Roki now sees that "I passed terrible trauma things in war but now I must think to the front, to the future."

Uncertainty of futures Life experiences shape and constrain how youth see their futures (Raffaelli & Koller, 2005). In the case of refugees, traumatic pasts where they have been suddenly and unpredictably uprooted have made their futures seem equally unpredictable. The permanently temporary limbo of the refugees in Macedonia compounds this unpredictability. They do not know if they will be deported tomorrow, find asylum, or have to stay in Macedonia. Any are possible at any time.

Written in 1998, *Mapping the Field* identifies several future trends likely to affect refugees. Among them are a downgrading of legal protection provided by UNHCR due to pressure from funding governments and the granting of only temporary protection in host countries (Rutter, 1998). Both have proven true in the case of the Roma refugees since 1999 and have affected how they envision their futures in a direct way. On several occasions the refugee youth demonstrated their inability to make long-term plans for the future. When Toni and Roki told me about the English course they want to organize for the refugees, they asked if I could come and teach it. I responded that it was a possibility, but only starting a year from August 2006 because I needed to finish my degree first. While they fully appreciated the need to “get diploma” because “this is the most important thing” (Roki), they laughed at the idea of making plans a year in advance.

Roki is currently on track to finish primary school up to the 8th grade at his evening school by the summer of 2008. This length of time is a problem for him because “two years ahead is too long to make plans for.” He has no idea if “I will be here two years to finish Primary School.” He wants to speak with the “Director of the School about if is there anyway that I can go faster to finish because it is too long time and I don't know do I will be still here.”

The refugees feel their futures are controlled by external factors: “well I don't know do we will stay in Macedonia, it depends on UNHCR.” For the moment, both Roki's and Toni's families are hoping the future will take them to Canada, where they recently applied for asylum. They are “still waiting for Correspond of Canada, because they said the process is 6 month or one year” (Toni). While they are hopeful, they are only cautiously optimistic because “survivors have learned that life is fragile. This can lead to a loss of faith in the future...a trait rare among most adolescents whose assumptions have not been so challenged” (Mosselson, 2006, p.31). The war and subsequent limbo has taught the refugees that plans can fall apart and lives can take very unexpected directions: “we don't know what is going to be next year” (Toni). Toni then lamented that “This war destroyed everything. It is our bad destiny. We are here day by day. After one day you don't know what will happen to you.” The refugee youth demonstrated repeatedly that the future is uncertain for them.

The refugees feel transitory in Macedonia but do not know where the future will take them. Crossing borders, acquiring languages, hybridizing cultures have characterized their pasts and, they feel, their futures. This is a community with full knowledge of the fact that cultures are not rooted in location (indeed, they were forcibly uprooted eight years ago), and instead are open to the fluidity and change of culture. There are many places they would be willing to go and they would prefer to go together as extended families. However, they would be willing to emigrate in small immediate family units for the sake of their children's educations and futures.

The uncertainty of the future is also expressed in their family relationships. There are three reasons for the vehemence with which both parents and children vowed to stay

together: those particular families happen to be loving and close and supportive families; family unity and family responsibility is an important part of Roma culture, and the trauma of war has made them especially close. Their closeness does not seem unusual for Roma culture- Roma families are united and many generations live together regardless of war. However, the feelings of unity seemed particularly strong in these families. When asserting that they could never leave their families (“I will never leave my father, no way, not after what we went through together” (Toni), “My situation depends of UNHCR, I don't know do they will send me back or somewhere out of this country, but what happens, I am not leaving my family, because you know in which situation we are, no way” (Roki)), both Toni and Roki make references to their refugee experiences. It is the trauma of war and being refugees with uncertain futures that makes it especially important for them to stay with their families. Their turbulent history together means they will find a future together. Family unity is a source of support, building resilience, and healing after the trauma of war and their uncertain refugee situations.

The fact that this family is more determined than other Roma families to stay together is expressed by the young single women. Of Roki’s three sisters and one aunt who were too young to marry before the war, all have remained single even though they are all past the usual ages to marry in their community. All are willing to give up the prestige of marriage to stay with the families they have experienced so much with. Marrying would mean living with their husband’s family and as their futures are uncertain, this could mean ending up in a place very far away from their parents and siblings to whom they are especially close after the trauma of the refugee experience.

The added uncertainties of marriage are not worth the prestige it would bring. Marriage automatically means living with the husband's family and reporting for housework duty to the mother-in-law. Staying single in a family with so many women also means that each one has relatively little housework, a relatively large amount of leisure time, and a large community of supportive women around them. None of these things would be guaranteed in a husband's family. The refugees have all experienced trauma in the past; the future is uncertain. By staying single and staying together, their family is certain.

Shifting identities

In a world of migrations, movement, and blurred ethnic lines where do refugees fit? With which nationality do they end up? Do their identities and futures change with their exile? These are questions that cannot be generalized. Each individual has a story and circumstances that are uniquely theirs. However, they are questions that I think most refugees will have to contend with. For the Roma refugees, these questions are difficult for two reasons: they are Roma, and they are refugees. As Roma, they are seen as Roma before Serbian or Kosovar despite language, passports, or lifelong residence. As refugees they have to break with their pasts and reconstruct their futures among new communities where they are outsiders. The passports they currently hold are of Yugoslavia, a country that no longer exists. 'Refugee' has become as much a part of their identity as 'Kosovar,' if not more so, because it is something that will continue to identify them to the world. They feel as if they belong nowhere, or to a place yet unknown in this period of transition. Cultural belonging is found in people and communities that can be international in nature and transported elsewhere.

The refugees have undergone a shift in their identities since experiencing a major rupture in their lives in 1999. Where they used to be electricians and blacksmiths, they are now refugees. They came from a place where they were distinguished as the only Roma in their villages to a place where everyone is Roma. When they were surrounded by Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, 'Roma' was their major identifier. Now that they live among Roma, society sees them as refugees. Either way, the dominant society sees them as outsiders. They now define themselves primarily as: members of the Kurteshi and Azemin families, as refugees, and as Kovači Roma rather than Roma.

As discussed in previous sections, close family bonds are important for the Roma refugees for emotional support, a source of resilience and healing from a traumatic past. They are now also an important source of the refugees' identities. Although Roki and Toni now speak Macedonian well, desire to attend school in Skopje, and have Macedonian Roma friends, they still feel transitory in Macedonia. Their future hopes do not include Macedonia in any significant way. Although they have lived in the Roma community for several years, their Macedonian Rom identity will easily be shed should they have an opportunity to leave. Now that they have no ties to their villages in Kosovo, and many Kosovo Roma have been displaced to various countries, Toni and Roki's close ties are only to their extended families. They have now become the community they rely on for support. These are the people they are loyal to since they have no contact with Macedonians, they no longer have ties to Kosovo, and Macedonian Roma friendships feel fleeting.

The label of refugee now plays a large role in defining Toni, Roki, and their families. Although the international community defines them as asylum seekers, they use

the term ‘refugees’ for themselves because they feel it is a sufficiently emotive word that captures the trauma of losing their homes and former lives because of war. They are conscious of their refugee-ness when they deal with UNHCR, when they are frustrated by their uncertain legal limbo, and when they fear rumors of being deported to Kosovo. In other words, much of their current lives. They also feel their refugee-ness when interacting with residents of Šutka. Since they are all Roma, what differentiates them in Šutka is being refugees. Roki is reminded of this at his night school when his classmates “teasing me ‘you are refugee ha ha ha, why you came here go back in Kosovo.’” The label of refugee can both bring problems, such as the teasing at school, or it can be useful. Roki has used it as a convenient tool for seeking help, such as when he writes to schools and asks them to accept him because he is a refugee or when he asked me to take pictures of his school so “people can see how it is for refugees like me.” It can be a word that evokes pity.

Although the refugees refer to themselves as refugees, they also find this label limiting or frustrating at times, such as Roki’s run in with the mayor (see the *Resistance to Representation* section) or the teasing at school. They therefore feel the need to distinguish themselves from the refugees. Although many young refugees either speak some English or want to learn, Roki insists “of all the refugees, only Toni and I speak OK English.”

Rather than ‘refugees,’ a major way of distinguishing themselves in a positive way in a Roma community is to define themselves as Kovači Roma, an ethnic group not common among the Roma in Šutka. This came up several times during the interviews: “We are something special among Roma, us Kovači. We have more respect than Šutka

Roma. The Kovači Roma want education more than Šutka people” (Toni), “These Šutka Roma don’t care about education like us” (Mimoza), “In Šutka education is not important” (Hussein). In Šutka, where everyone is Roma, they are often differentiated and marginalized with the term ‘refugee.’ As a response, Kovači has become a growing source of identity and ethnic pride. This is something they can associate with positive qualities, such as valuing education and a dialect of Romanes they consider elegant. As proof they told me about the levels of education of the Kovači men who were able to finish school before the war. Many of the adult males who went through school before the war have reached higher education levels than the average Roma for the region. However, it is doubtful the women would have benefited in terms of their education if they had stayed in Kosovo.

CHAPTER SIX.

WHAT DOES EDUCATION MEAN TO THE ROMA REFUGEE YOUTH?

Attitudes to education

One of Roki and Toni's greatest desires at this point in their lives is to study and finish school in an environment that welcomes and encourages them. The Roma refugees do not fit any of the molds the studies by Tamas, UNMIK and Regan suggest (see chapter three). Instead, one of the points they most strongly emphasize during the interviews is how much they would like to attend a mainstream school were they can get a decent education and a degree. They repeated their desire to go to school many times:

"i must to finish school and to have diploma to be auto mecanic, but I don't have it." "My wish is to go somewhere where can I have good life to live, and finish school, for example in your country or Swiss." "I would be very, very happy if I can finish school, and have a work." "I'm very scared I will have no school and no good work." "I would like very much to finish (secondary) school and study at academy of music." "I am not happy, I would be happy when I will finish my school and have home and work. that will make me happy." "I would be very very happy if i can finish school, and Have my House like anyone in the world, and have a work." "if I would be in America I will get in school do you think so?" "I want to finish school and find work." "Yes, I want to finish studies... we tried everywhere to go to school."

They all brightened when talking about school and were enthusiastic in researching American schools and online courses. Concerned I needed more evidence, Roki showed me his small library of English books from friends in UNHCR who recognize his desire to improve his English. He has read most of them and told me "you see, here is proof I really want to study." When it comes to school and outlook on education, Roki is idealistic and determined to get an education but more frustrated with life; Toni is pragmatic and disillusioned with education but happier with life.

Education is a mechanism by which the Roma refugee youth feel they can alleviate their fears from the past by ending their current frustrations and preparing for a hopeful future. Education is important for the present because it bring stability to their

lives and because it can be used as a tool to actively seek solutions and better their situations. Education is important for the future because it is a source of capital that prepares the refugees for an uncertain future. The rest of the analysis will be devoted to discussing education in these roles. There were two themes that run through all of them; family and language.

Family As discussed in the ‘Obstacles’ section, the idea of ‘helping their families’ is always present in the lives and decisions of the refugee youth. As they get older, they increasingly feel the need to take on increased responsibilities in the family by working and contributing to the family income. Education, like work, is also tied to family responsibility for Toni and Roki. Education and a degree would mean a meaningful career because a “diploma is very important for a good work” (Roki). As young men, meaningful work is a way to “help my family” (Edri). In this way, they can fulfill their responsibilities to the families they are so close to (in part because they have loving families, family unity and family responsibility is an important part of Roma culture, the trauma of war has made them especially close).

The refugees’ idea of success is not simply their own social and economic well-being, but that of their families as well. For them, achievement and success involve taking care of one’s family and acting on familial loyalty and gratitude (Suarez-Orozco, 1989). Education, therefore, is for the future stability of the family. Educational goals are tied to family life and family responsibility and the future stability of the family.

Language While the native language of this population is Romanes, they are a very multilingual community. According to Sanela “we speak many languages. Five or six is normal for us. We are very good at languages.” Each of the Roma refugee youth

proudly told me about his linguistic abilities during the conversations: “I know speaking Roma¹⁹, srbian, Albanian, Macedonian, English. I understand croation, Bosna²⁰ and not much sweden and german” (Roki). “I speak many languages- Romanes, Serb, Albanian, Makedonsky, Duetsch, and some English...it’s useful to speak many languages but sometimes I mix them up” (Edri). “I know Germany, English, Turkish, a little French, Serbish, Makedonish, Albanish, Romanes, and I try to read Arabic” (Toni). “I speak Romanes best, then Macedonian, then Albanian, and some Serb” (Meori). All speak Romanes natively although they rarely read or write it. The three oldest speak Serbian and Albanian at native or near native levels and are fluent in Macedonian. Meori speaks Macedonian the best because he has studied it in school the longest but is not quite as fluent in Serbian and Albanian as the others because he was too young to study them in Kosovo. While I have no basis to judge their German, Arabic, French, or Turkish, I was impressed with the English of Roki, Toni, and Edri. Although they make many grammatical mistakes, they communicate well and have each attained an impressive level of fluency in English, a language to which they have had no formal access. It is a testament to their diligence, sociability, and intelligence. They are thus better at speaking and understanding than reading and writing, because those are the skills to which they have most access. They also impressed me with their translating skills and ability to codeswitch easily between Romanes, Albanian, Serbian, Macedonian, and English (and German in Toni and Edri’s case). Roki and Toni have a competition over who can speak the best English: “Toni was better than me and always laughing at me so I study and now

¹⁹ The refugees speak both Kosovo Kovači Romanes and Macedonian Romanes, which are different enough to be largely mutually unintelligible.

²⁰ Both Croatian and Bosnian are mutually intelligible with Serbian and until recently considered dialects of the Serbo-Croatian language.

I'm better than him so he can't say nothing anymore.” English was a language only the youth had made an effort to learn. Children who attend school in Macedonia are not learning it and neither are adults who finished school in Kosovo (with Osman the interpreter being an exception).

While their multilingual skills are impressive, what is significant is the importance languages play in their lives. Learning languages is a way of adapting to and navigating new contexts whether they find themselves in a Macedonian shop, trying to fit in with the Šutka Roma, unexpectedly caught in an Albanian neighborhood, or meeting with UNHCR officials. Facilitating adaptation with multilingualism is a trait characteristic of many Roma, all of whom find themselves part of a minoritized group within a dominant society and need to navigate both Roma and non-Roma culture. However, for those who are still in regions of ethnic conflict, such as the Roma refugees of Šutka, this becomes all the more crucial. Roki even credits his linguistic skills as having “saved my life.” When he was eleven years old, he went to buy beer for his dad and some men heard him speaking Albanian to some Egyptians. These Roma did not like Egyptians and thought he was one as well and wanted to beat him up. But he quickly insisted that no, he's visiting from Germany. They asked him to prove it so he spoke German to them and they left him alone. He also cited his recent concert for an Albanian audience. He feels sure that the audience would have turned on his band if it were not for their flawless Albanian and knowledge of Albanian songs.

Languages are critical skills for navigating the ethnic tensions of the Balkans. In addition, they are also: a substitute for formal education, a means of lobbying UNHCR

about a solution, a means of developing contacts, and an investment for an uncertain future. These will all be discussed in greater detail below.

Education as stability

Without school, the refugee youth have much free time. In August, Roki declared “I’m bored” referring to the lack of studying and band practice during that time and the lack of anything to challenge him in general. As a result, they fill much of their time studying music, computers, and languages on their own. These skills play an important role in alleviating their boredom. All three skills are a source of pride for the youth, especially that they are taking the initiative to acquire them and teaching themselves. In addition, they play another role in their lives.

Not only is education important for refugees as an investment for their well-being in an uncertain future, but it also provides stability during uncertain, often traumatic times. Schooling is therefore an important part of psychosocial rehabilitation for refugees because “schools can make a difference to the further adjustment of children who have been unwitting victims of adults’ failures to resolve differences other than by war” (Mosselson, 2006, p.37). Providing a sense of stability and meeting educational needs are important aspects of meeting a refugee youth’s overall well-being and mental health needs (Yule, 1998).

The stability found in formal schooling is something the refugee youth crave. However, since they are unable gain admittance into a school where they are academically challenged, where they feel welcome and comfortable, or where they are satisfied with the teaching, they have looked for alternate sources of stability in other activities. They are replacing the stability offered by formal schooling with a regular

routine of music, computers, and language study on their own. Since age eleven, both Roki and Toni have experienced only sporadic schooling and have sought to provide their own educations through informal learning in order to bring a sense of stability to their lives. Where Meori has school, Roki has language and music, and Toni has computers and language. Although Roki has been attending school since early 2006, he spent many years not attending school. The evening course he currently attends only meets for one hour per day and does not adequately meet Roki's educational needs. Roki, like Toni, is searching to replace the stability found in formal schooling with an education he is providing for himself. Roki has made an especially structured routine for himself:

I learn english by my self, I always get in room alone and study, I am learning about 21:00 untill 22:00, becauase I am busy by plaing music before... i am going there to practice at 16:00 clock and coming house 20:00 a clock and than I am hungry and eating something and after that I am study and than I am going to sleap and wake up about 11:00 a clock.

Music is where much of his energy has been devoted since joining a band last year. He practices with the other group members for several hours five afternoons per week. The practices have become a form of education to him because the band is led by two of his uncles who are teaching him and the other bandmates to play Romani music.

Toni's life is structured by his work schedule. Some days he works the 10am-6pm shift and some days he works the 6pm-12am shift (three or four days a week). It is during this time that he develops computer skills and practices English. At his internet café, he "trained myself to work with computers. It's better to learn by yourself. I want to know every job I see. I'm interesting to know everything." He is happy to provide his own education and takes the initiative to acquire the skills he wants.

Language education is an important part of both Roki and Toni's routines and self-study. Toni is making an effort to learn Arabic, Turkish, and English by seeking out

people with whom he can speak these languages, asking them for lessons, reading books given to him by Paul Polansky, watching TV and listening to music in English, and corresponding with friends via email in those languages. Roki uses similar methods to teach himself English. He proudly showed me the small library of grammar and English learning textbooks he has accumulated through the internationals. He claims to study these books on his own nearly daily and took advantage of my presence every evening in August to ask me about the grammar and vocabulary he found difficult in his textbooks. He was always an enthusiastic student. Roki also makes an effort to befriend UNHCR workers and any native English speakers can find in order to practice speaking. Roki and Toni are also trying to organize English courses for themselves and other refugee youth if they can find donations and a teacher. They are doing this in order to formalize their self-tutoring, make language education more available for the refugees, and to improve their skills. For both Roki and Toni, languages occupy much of their time and are an education they can provide for themselves in lieu of formal schooling.

While they would still like to attend school, the youth have learned more skills than those they are actively pursuing (computers, music, languages). They unknowingly have learned to stand up for themselves and their families, to act as a lawyers for their families with UNHCR. They have learned laws, legal loopholes, immigration policies, admissions policies, human rights, taught themselves networking and communication skills and how to make and keep useful contacts, and they have learned to actively pursue what they need.

While Meori has had the advantage of being able to transition relatively smoothly in a school in Šutka, something Roki and Toni wish they could do, the latter have created

some advantages of their own that Meori has not felt the need to do. There is a difference between him and the older youth. Meori does not speak English, nor has he taught himself any languages, music or computer skills. Because he has had more regular access to formal schooling, he has not been as proactive in teaching himself skills as have Roki and Toni. He does not have as much free time, nor does he feel the need to bring stability to his life by providing his own education.

Both Roki and Toni are proud and defiant that they have acquired these skills largely on their own, as if to spite a society that they feel is trying to keep them from getting an education. Toni is proud that “I was teacher of myself.” They still want to go to school and are bitter about not being able to do so. As it is, Roki is “not happy, I would be happy when I will finish my school and have home and work. that will make me happy.” Steady music practice and language study is a form of replacement education and puts stability in life. However, Roki feels that without a diploma, this skills are insufficient preparation for the future. This is why Roki is unhappy and values Meori’s education over his self-tutoring. Despite the fact that Roki and Toni share this pride/resentment, there is a difference in the way that Roki and Toni view the education they are intent on giving themselves.

Toni, like Roki, is intent on giving himself an education but still considers self-teaching inferior to quality formal schooling and a diploma. They both wish they could find a good school and graduate. However, unlike Roki, Toni is not willing to settle for low quality formal schooling for the sake of a diploma. He considers work, life experience, and learning on his own to be more useful than a bad school. According to Toni “It’s better to work” than to get a sub-par education whereas Roki “will stay with

the bad conditions and hope for normal school in the future.” Although both are giving themselves an education, Toni places a much greater value on this. While he feels a diploma is important, he also sees the value of learning on your own and acquiring skills useful for work (which can be done outside of schools). Roki is doing these things as well, but Toni recognizes their value more than Roki. The difference can be attributed to their difference in upbringing, personalities, and to the fact that Toni has a part-time job he finds stimulating whereas Roki does not. Toni’s internet job helps to provide him with a challenge and routine while Roki can only occasional work in construction or factory work, neither of which he finds interesting.

Education as agency

The refugees often feel that their lives are determined by outside factors: regional ethnic tensions and war, governments’ immigration policies, school admissions decisions, and especially UNHCR. They feel they have no control over their own lives because “my situation depends of UNHCR, I don't know do they will send me back or somewhere out of this country” (Toni). The educations that the refugee youth are providing for themselves not only help bring stability to their lives; they also provide an important tool for taking control over their lives and fighting to better their situations. The major way the refugee youth are doing this is with their language educations. Language skills are an important networking tool for the refugee youth because they use English to give themselves a voice in the international community and to tell their stories:

I learned english because it was very neccessary for me to talk with people when they are coming and asking about my situation and I explain it to them. English language is very important for me to have Contack with people, because I don't need someone to translate for me I can say to him by my self, for example about my situation in Kosovo. And I will write my History and make book in english, and I can give to people to read my book (Roki)²¹.

²¹ Roki’s autobiography, detailing his life from 1999 to 2003, is partially included in the appendices of this paper. He started writing it during the Greek border period at the request of Paul Polansky.

The English education that the refugee youth have given themselves is crucial for their sense of agency. With it, they feel they can be proactive in finding solutions to their legal limbo and education barriers. They do this by lobbying UNHCR and other internationals on behalf of their families. Because he speaks English, Roki says “I am advocate for my family.” For Roki this is one of the most important reasons to study languages: “I need English to talk to UNHCR people, to tell them about my family’s situation, to ask for help.” Meori also hopes to learn for the same reason. With English, “I can go to UNHCR for my family like Roki.” It is important to note that the refugee youth feel a family responsibility to act as lawyers on behalf of their families. The youth do not speak fondly about anyone at UNHCR and yet they feel compelled to maintain these relationships so that “UNHCR can remember my family” (Toni). Language and advocacy skills are therefore tools to help not only themselves, but their families as a whole.

English and advocacy are also a way to give their families an advantage over other refugees. According to Toni, “none of the other refugees can do this, only me and Roki, so we can talk more with UNHCR people.” Without English, they would have a difficult time cultivating close (and useful) relationships with the internationals at UNHCR. They would need to rely on an Albanian interpreter and would have more difficulty scheduling appointments. Roki credits his English skills, his persistent lobbying, and his personal contacts in giving his family the ‘special circumstances’ that kept them from being deported to either Kosovo or Serbia last August. English is a way to communicate his story and his needs to people who will listen and potentially help

him. English is a tool for self-advocacy among the international agencies in Macedonia and the wider world.

The primary target of the refugee youths' lobby skills is UNHCR because "everything depends on Catherine Walker [head of UNHCR Macedonia]." At a recent UNHCR youth meeting, Roki had a chance to say

that I don't feel free here in Macedonia, and what about my education? they said to me, UNICEF and UNHCR don't have donation that can help me. I told them I can't go back to Kosovo, because there is not future for me, what I gona do then? Then the UNHCR people said, those Familys who can't return we have to find them solution in others countrys.

But Roki feels that this answer was given only to appease the refugees because "I think UNHCR will not be longer here... they are making interviews with everyone and so to see who can go back to Kosovo... I think they will send many refugees back in Kosovo."

Although Roki (and Toni to a lesser degree) has been persistent in lobbying, he is becoming discouraged: "I think that UNHCR can't help about education, and I try it many times, I mean I went to their office and talk with them but nothing." After eight years, the refugee youth are frustrated by the lack of help they are receiving from UNHCR in terms of both ending their temporary limbo period and continuing their education. By making as many contacts as possible and networking with any many people as they can, they are hoping to find solutions for themselves by other means instead of relying on UNHCR. They have been proactive in researching every avenue of help, including asking me to help make sense of English grammar, and immigration and admissions policies.

Roki and Toni were very proactive in asking me for help. They asked me to contact embassies and inquire about immigration processes ("ask to the American Embassy do they are interesting about refugees from Macedonia? ask them about my

family so I can come in America with my family.”), help them research online courses, and help write recommendation letters and visit admissions offices in various schools in Skopje (“Karen about nova school you can write to them, ask to them if there is anyway that can accept me?”). When there was no one to accompany them to speak to admissions coordinators, they took the initiative to go themselves. After a number of failed attempts to gain admission into an existing school, they are taking the initiative to create formal schooling for themselves. According to Toni, “Roki and I want to organize English lessons in Šutka for refugee community. We want to get donations from the internationals to pay a teacher.” They discussed logistics with me at length and asked me “do you want to be the teacher for us?” With options in Šutka becoming slim, they are still looking for some other way to study in a classroom and ideally get a diploma. Searching for online courses and creating their own English course for refugees are proactive ways to continue their educations without having to wait for an acceptance letter or a UNHCR decision. Both youth were also persistent in asking me for help with English. They practiced speaking with me as much as possible and asked for grammar lessons as often as possible during my stay in Macedonia. They still ask me to correct their grammar via internet and ask me to send books in English (especially textbooks).

UNHCR occasionally holds meetings with the refugee youth. While Toni only attends some of the time, Roki does not miss a meeting or an opportunity to voice his concerns. This illustrates a difference between the refugee youth. While education and language skills are useful to both as tools to network and proactively explore solutions, Toni is more discouraged (and a little busier) than Roki. Toni does lobby UNHCR, research schools, and explore immigration options, but Roki is much more persistent in

doing all of these things. The value of education as a tool for self advocacy is much stronger for Roki, whereas Toni values education and language skills more as tools to communicate and build relationships for the future.

Roki expressed his need to complete his education in one succinct sentence: “I must fight for my human right.” One afternoon Roki demanded of me to “tell me about human rights. I want to know all. I know I have the right to education, but what more?” He wants a voice in the international community that is deciding his fate and has decided to “to study about refugee rights to know how to fight.” He therefore wants to learn the details and the vocabulary of international human rights in order to voice his concerns and “to report when UNHCR and UNICEF don’t respect my rights.” He also plans to “go to Nova School (one of the expensive American schools) and tell them to let me study because it is my human right.” Like English, he is determined to learn and use his new knowledge as a tool to change his situation even if he has to “learn myself like I study English.”

Roki may have an opportunity try out his new human rights knowledge soon. UNHCR recently asked Roki to attend a conference about refugees in Strasbourg. Roki says, “I’m scared to go alone” because he has never traveled alone and has never flown in an airplane. However, he says he will face his fear “because I must fight for our rights.” He then added another fear: “I’m really scared sometimes from what I passed in the war. I’m scared deep in my soul. I am trauma from war. It was terrible for a child. That’s why I must go to Strasbourg – to tell my story and fight for refugee rights.”

Access to schooling is important because “refugees seem to gain a semblance of control by seeking and valuing a strong education” (Mosselson, 2006, p.184). Although

the Roma refugee youth in this study do not have access to quality schooling, the education they are providing for themselves is helping to instill a sense of control and agency in them. Although constantly asking for help, these refugee youth do not fit the passive/helpless image or stereotype usually attributed to refugees. They have shown a sense of agency by actively seeking to change their situation and better their futures despite obstacles. Although they are discouraged, do not yet see tangible results of their lobbying, and do not realistically see escape from Macedonia in the foreseeable future, they are still trying to leave and feel their future depends upon that.

According to Rachel Brett, to make negative assumptions “is to deny the individual experiences,” and is likely to further stigmatize them and “limit their future prospects and status in society” (Brett, 2002, p.2). While her study focused on girl soldiers, the idea of not categorizing and not recognizing individual stories can also apply to refugee youth. While their situation is dire the refugee youth of Šutka are not passive victims waiting for help. They view UNHCR workers and people like myself, who try to be useful in some way, as tools and means of figuring out their own solution. They are proactive in investigating every channel of help.

Formal schooling also helps to bring a semblance of control to the lives of Roma refugees because it serves as a tool to fight not only for their rights, but also to fight negative representations of themselves as Roma and as refugees. As discussed in a previous section, the Roma refugees are very resentful of these representations of themselves made by foreigners always seem to show the same images associated with Roma and reinforce them by spreading those images. The Roma resent having these images, not their creation and beyond their control, cemented in the wider world. A

central problem for this community is one of “invisibility and namelessness” (Barker, 2005, p.413), which Barker associates with the Black Diaspora because of their “relative lack of power to represent themselves as complex human beings and to contest the negative stereotypes that abound” (p.413).

The refugee youth want to be educated partly so that they do not fit the image of refugees as passive, ignorant victims or of Roma as thieves and tricksters, wandering carefree musicians, or poverty stricken and welfare bound. They seem to be “represented through sharply opposed binary extremes- good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic” (Hall, 2001, p.229) which Hall applied to the black diaspora but can apply to other feared/exotized marginalized groups, such as the Roma. Education is a means to avoid becoming what is expected of Roma refugees: the ridiculous characters of ‘The Šutka Book of Records,’ the uneducated average Rom in Šutka, the typical refugee that the mayor has in mind, or Paul Polansky’s poverty stricken images in the mud. They are not expected to be educated, and so they want to prove society wrong.

Roki demonstrated this one night after a concert where his band had played together with a band from Sweden in Šutka to learn Romani music. The Swedes were impressed with his English, intelligence, and eloquence and asked to interview him on camera. When asked what music meant to him and what he wanted for his future, he responded that “I want to finish school and find work. Music is only my hobby” even though “I think they wanted me to say I want to be a musician.” He would like stable work for which a degree is required. Roki took pleasure in having future aspirations that were not expected of him.

Education as an investment for an uncertain future

Future aspirations Both Toni and Meori share something in common regarding their aspirations; neither has any idea what he wants to do as a career. When asked about his future plans, Meori responded: “My plans? I will see what is best for me then. I don’t have some specific plan because I don’t know how long we will be here or where we will be. I am maybe interested in university but I will see.” While Toni is more specific regarding his personal life: “My dream for future is not to have problems with people, to have my home where I belong, to have my family and be together, no wars, to have a girlfriend and then to have my own family,” he is just as vague as Meori regarding a future career: “I want to have a good work but I don’t know what.” He is interested in computers but he really cannot say if they will lead to a lifelong career. The only thing he knows for certain is that he “would like to work for myself but also work to help my family.”

Roki, on the other hand, has many constantly changing ideas. During the interviews he frequently changed his professional goals citing auto mechanic, professor (“my plan is to be Professor, or Auto Mecanic, fixing cars, you know”), musician, interpreter, lawyer (“so I can stay advocate for my family and refugee rights”), and electrician (“I think to study electric profession”) as possible professions, although he is uncertain as to what he would really like to do or what would be a practical option for him.

While Roki does mention at one point that “I want to study at music academy,” when the Swedes interviewed him after a joint concert, Roki thought that “they wanted me to say I want to be a musician.” But Roki told them he has other plans: “I want to

finish school and find work. Music is only my hobby.” Or perhaps “maybe I would like to study music if I can also study something else.” He enjoys music and would probably enjoy a related career but he is afraid music lacks stability because “music is not always. Sometimes you play weddings, sometimes nothing.” Stability in a career is essential for him because his refugee experience has thus far proven very unstable. Apart from this, he lights up at the thought of “someday to study at a music academy.” His heart is in music but he is being pragmatic about his future and does not see music as a suitable career path: “I don’t want a music career, I prefer auto mechanic.”

While future goals was one of the topics Roki most elaborated upon during the interviews, Meori and Toni both thought the topic was stupid because “after one day you don’t know what will happen to you” (Toni) in their refugee experience. It is therefore impossible to plan a career. The refugee youth share the trait of not being able to plan any specifics. Careers are uncertain because they entail making concrete plans; none of the refugee youth can make concrete plans because the future is unpredictable for them. Their future aspirations are therefore greatly affected by the uncertainty of their futures. Although articulated in many different ways, their goals are clear. They want to study and get a degree to get a job, and they want stable home and family lives. Roki’s wish “is to go somewhere where can I have good life to live, and finish school, for example in your country or Swiss.” Instead of specific careers, the refugees’ future aspirations all involve plans or desires to finish school in peace:

“my plans is to finishing school and than we will see about future.” “i must to finish school and to have diploma to be auto mecanic.” “I’m very scared I will have no school and no good work.” “I would like very much to finish (secondary) school and study at academy of music.” “I am not happy, I would be happy when I will finish my school and have home and work. that will make me happy.” “I would be very very happy if i can finish school, and Have my House like anyone in the world, and have a work.” “if I would be in America I will get in school do you think so?” “I want to finish school and find work.” “Yes, I want to finish studies... we tried everywhere to go to school.”

Education as investment While showing me a desktop computer in an internet café, Roki told me “I would like to have one of these but a laptop is best for me because of my situation. I could take it anywhere.” While he would perhaps prefer to establish roots and have a desktop computer somewhere, he knows that the future is unpredictable and he can be uprooted at anytime. A laptop would be practical because it can go with him.

In a recent study of Bosnian refugees in New York, Mosselson found that refugees

have suffered a great loss – of family members, homes, the imagined community of Yugoslavia, money, and safety, among other things – all the refugees in this research lauded the value of education as giving them a portfolio of skills and knowledge that would travel with them should they be obliged to move again. The value of education runs deep for those who have learned that life can be transient” (Mosselson, 2007, p.105).

Refugees “have experienced life as fragile and tenuous – that material assets and status can be lost” (Mosselson, 2007, p.106). This is certainly true of the Roma refugees in this study; in the war they lost their homes, friends, possessions (including transcripts), trust in other ethnic groups, sense of security, former livelihoods and traditions (such as blacksmithing), among other things. The refugee youth now see education as key for their futures because “people who have been forcibly uprooted from their lives, who have left everything behind, shift their focus to transferable and transportable skills that can go anywhere with them” (Mosselson, 2006, p.165). Roki’s interest in laptops comes from their portability. Education is an important source of transferable and transportable capital (Mosselson, 2006) for Roki and Toni because they have been uprooted before and know it is likely happen again. Education is hopeful investment for an uncertain future.

The idea of education as an investment for the future extends to both formal education and the informal education the refugee youth are providing for themselves.

Since they feel they cannot make specific plans, they are actively seeking all the things – language skills, computer and music skills, knowledge about the world, knowledge about immigration procedures, making international contacts, a voice in the international community, etc. – that they consider investments for their futures as global citizens.

Roki and Toni came back excited from a UNHCR lobbying session one day because they had been complimented on their English. A UNHCR employee told them he was impressed with their English and told them to keep it up. Toni agreed because “you never know where the future will take you.” English language skills are an importance source of transportable capital for the refugee youth because they see English as an investment to travel and work anywhere, giving them the ability to navigate a new society. While some of the languages they speak have cultural importance (such as Arabic for Toni), the youth place a great deal of emphasis on the utility of languages, especially English. They want to study English because “English language is very important for me” and because “English is useful international language...I will use it in my future I am sure (Roki).” Networking and building useful contacts among people in different cultures is also a way the refugees prepare for the future. Meori is “very interested to learn English because... I can communicate with people and have contact with you.” Toni similarly feels that “the more languages I know the more I can contact with people.” Languages are social capital to communicate with people and cultivate relationships that might be useful for the future.

A knowledge of English represents a solid investment for an uncertain future. The youth feel that if they are fluent in English, they can be better prepared to adjust anywhere they may end up in the future. In the absence of formal lessons, they study

English and other useful skills diligently because “refugees are fully aware of transience, and thus work to ensure that potential future adjustments will be facilitated” (Mosselson, 2006, p.165). Roki sees language and other skills as necessary to make such adjustments and be prepared for life anywhere.

Self-acquired skills are an important source of capital, but they are insufficient on their own. The reason the refugee youth have been making such an effort to find a school and are now so frustrated is because they see formal education as an important source of transportable capital for the future, but they are unable to obtain it.

Where Toni is more disillusioned, he is also more pragmatic than Roki. Roki’s idealism makes him more persistent/resolute in his search for formal education. Unfortunately, the schools he most would like to attend are the ones that are least likely to accept him, for a variety of reasons. Even if they were to accept him, there is little chance he could afford the tuition. Yet he persists in applying. Why is he so adamant about attending expensive American schools that keep rejecting him? Roki does not feel Macedonia will play any role in his future and hopes to emigrate, although he is unsure where. He therefore wants a degree he feels is ‘international.’ Also, the instruction is in English, which is important to him. For him, any formal education is certainly portable capital, however some educations are more easily transferred to new contexts than others. He has set up a hierarchy of diplomas and views an international education as ‘better’ capital than a Macedonian one because it can prepare him for life elsewhere. He is also disillusioned with Macedonia. Toni feels this way as well. Although he is not applying to American schools (it feels futile to him), he was enthusiastic in researching online courses because they offered American or international secondary school degrees.

Importance of diplomas Formal education is an important source of capital for the refugees for both knowledge learned and the degree they receive (“Diploma is very important for a good work” -Roki). When researching online courses, Toni’s primary concerns were: “Are these courses recognized?” “Is there a diploma with these courses? Is this diploma recognized?” Roki feels a diploma is crucial for his future because “I must to finish school and to have diploma to be auto mecanic, but I don't have it.” When he first heard about the vocational school Koco Racim, Roki felt that it offered a “very nice diploma because you can work.”

A diploma from an inferior school does not have the capital of a mainstream, recognized school diploma (especially an international diploma in Roki’s case). Roki views the education at his night school as substandard and therefore the capital he will gain as substandard and inadequate preparation for the future. The evening school is simply better than nothing for him. He knows he is capable of an education which will serve him better and is therefore motivated to continue applying despite numerous rejections. Roki informed me that “the diploma from night school is not good because you can’t use it to go up and study more.” It offers a terminal primary school diploma that is either not prestigious or not recognized by secondary schools. Since he has no other options, Roki says that he will stay because

we must get diploma. This is the most important thing. We must go even if the school is bad. The beatings and the bad teacher don’t matter. The school is dirty, conditions are catastrophe but it’s OK if we get a diploma.

Toni and Edri feel that a substandard education, such as the one provided by the evening school, is not worth the negative experience they would have to endure. Roki repeatedly insists, “I tell Toni and Edri, you must come to the night school, but they won’t come. It’s important for the diploma, you know.” However, Toni is increasing his hours at the

internet café and is slowing down his search for schools. If the only possibility left is a substandard terminal diploma, he would rather spend his time acquiring skills on his own.

While the skills the refugee youth are taking the initiative to acquire are an important investment for the future, they feel opportunities are not sufficiently broadened without a diploma. They are sure that a recognized diploma is essential for the future and the well-being of their families.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Schools in Macedonia are losing an important opportunity for two reasons. One is that “refugee students can bring into the classroom a range of opportunities and perspectives that can enrich the learning and understandings of everyone working there” (Rutter, 1998, p.3). The other is that schools can play an important role and provide an important forum for helping to resolve ethnic conflict through peace education. This should be especially important for Macedonia, since the war was so close to home and ethnic tensions have not subsided.

This study sought to understand the important role that education plays in the lives of refugee youth as psychosocial rehabilitation, agency, and an investment for their futures. These roles are so important that, in their absence, the refugees try to create them themselves. While their self-tutoring helps bring stability and a sense of agency to their lives, they feel a lack of formal schooling/diploma makes them ill prepared for the future. They remain frustrated and ill equipped to find work and help support their families, an increasingly pressing concern.

Quality basic education and vocational training are imperative for these refugee youth for several reasons:

- Education is an essential part of the psychosocial rehabilitation of refugee youth. It provides stability and hope in their lives.
- These youth want to have access to education. They want to learn, they want the same opportunities as youth in their host country, and they want a recognized diploma that will help them find work to support their families.
- They are bored. They live in a community with few work and education opportunities and feel as if they are being wasted.
- There is intelligence, motivation and potential in this community as demonstrated by their acquisition of a number of useful skills and their repeated desire to study.

This study also sought to explore the schooling and life experiences of a small community of refugee youth. This group, who is at an overlooked age, fell through the gaps between short-term relief efforts immediately following the war in Kosovo and longer-term development efforts. The purpose of this study was to shed light on the resulting challenges they currently face in their struggle to obtain an education, and the strategies they use to cope with hardships. I found them to very resilient, determined, pro-active, and future-oriented; despite the traumatic experiences they have had during the war, their escape from Kosovo, and their unpredictable life as refugees in a ‘permanently temporary’ limbo. Lastly, it served as a platform for Roki and Toni to tell their stories.

During one conversation, Roki and Toni wondered what I really wanted to know by asking about their lives and school. My primary research question then became an interview question. Without hesitation, Roki summed up what education means to him: “For me education means to be educated like everyone in world, and to have work when you will finish the school. I would be very, very happy if I can finish school, and have a work.”

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APPENDICES

Timeline of the 1999 war in Kosovo

1974 – Kosovo became a self-governing province within Yugoslavia. The Albanian majority established considerable autonomy and the Serb minority was alarmed but powerless.

1980s – Milosevic rose to power in Yugoslavia

1989 – Milosevic abolished Kosovo's autonomy, fired Albanian civil service workers and abolished Albanian language schooling. Serbian authority returned.

Early 1990s – Albanians responded by establishing an underground "parallel system" encompassing their own healthcare, education, and government.

Late 1990s – Albanian resistance to Serbian control became increasingly violent and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was formed.

1998 – The KLA controlled a third of Kosovo by July after violent clashes with Serbian military police who responded with a massive military campaign in which about 200,000 civilians were displaced. The KLA was forced to retreat.

1999 – Serb police massacred 45 Albanians in the village of Racak in January and international attention focused on Kosovo. Milosevic rejected a proposed peace plan in March and NATO began a bombing campaign over Kosovo and Serbia on March 24th. 78 days of extensive bombing and ethnic clashes caused massive infrastructural damage, nearly a million Kosovar Albanians to flee their homes, and 10,000 deaths (Sommers, 2004). The bombing ended on June 9th when Serbian troops pulled out of Kosovo and the newly formed KFOR troops now worked to maintain peace (comprised of NATO and Russian troops). Where KFOR had previously worked to protect Albanians, they now found themselves protecting Serbs and other minorities from violent Albanian backlashes in which 200,000 Serbs were forced to leave their homes and dozens of Serb monasteries were destroyed. Many Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians, who had been a part of the fabric of Kosovo for centuries, were also forced to leave alongside the Serbs, which whom they had been accused of collaborating. Most went to Montenegro, Albanian, or Macedonia. Some became IDPs in temporary shelters within Kosovo, such as the makeshift Roma camps near the town of Mitrovica where the World Health Organization recently found extremely dangerous levels of lead poisoning (UNCHR, 2005). The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was established on June 10th as the interim government of Kosovo.

By October, UNMIK reported that most public schools throughout Kosovo had reopened, many in either reconstructed buildings, temporary shelters, or tents. There was discussion of building a "single, inclusive education system that respected the language and cultural rights of all" (Sommers, 2004, p.81) but while the international community was involved in many of the physical aspects of school reconstruction, such as fixing buildings or procuring supplies, local communities banded together to find teachers, curricula, etc. As a result, a new version of the former parallel system was instituted. The segregated schooling system continued with Serb children learning a Serbian nationalistic curriculum in Serb schools and Albanian children in the same situation for their ethnic group. There are currently no integrated schools in Kosovo.

2000 – Ibrahim Rugova, the former leader of the parallel Albanian government, was elected. However, authority still lies with UNMIK.

2000s – UNMIK and KFOR are still present. Ethnic tensions still exists, as does nearly total segregation between Albanians and Serbs. Both see themselves as victims of history and believe that UNMIK clearly favors the other side. Albanians are largely in favor of independence (which would cement Albanian control) and Serbs would like to keep ties with Belgrade (who still pays their teachers' salaries).

2004 – The tentative peace was broken by six days of riots and ethnic cleansing on March 17th. After the murder of a Serbian student in a village near Priština, local Serbs took revenge by burning seven Albanian cars. Over the next six days, thousands of Albanians rioted in Serb villages, burned Serb houses, and forced hundreds of Serbs and dozens of Roma to leave their homes (Polansky, 2004).

2006 – Independence negotiations began.

2007 – Talk of independence continues. The Roma fear independence because they believe they will ethnically cleansed from Kosovo if the internationals leave.

Paul Polansky's poetry

Parking Lot Mahala, by Paul Polansky

I've been in every Gypsy Mahala
In Kosovo, almost 300 of them.
They are all the same
With unpaved roads
And ankle-deep mud
Whenever it rains.
But the parking lot on the border
That resembled a mahala
With the mud between the tents
Had one redeeming feature:
There was no garbage dump in sight.
In Kosovo, especially in
The Serbian communities
All garbage is dumped
In the Romani part of town.
On the border
There wasn't one piece of paper,
One tin can, one plastic bottle
Littering the parking lot.
Of course, when you
Don't get any food
There isn't
A lot of garbage (Polansky, 2003)

Excerpt from Roki's autobiography

One day, five KFOR soldiers and an Albanian interpreter came to my relatives' house and told my father to give them the keys to a mini-van that we had. It was the only thing of value we had from our village. My father didn't want to give it to them and so they wanted to take it by force because the interpreter had given them the wrong information. When my father showed the soldiers the papers for the car, they apologized

and left. The next day 4 other Albanians came and took the car. We could do nothing. I felt so bad. I felt worse when I heard that Albanians burned our house in our village and stole everything we had. These were my schoolmates and their parents that did this.

The Albanians wanted to chase us out and we spent everyday thinking about what to do and where to go. Thanks to my uncle and his friend, we heard about the refugee camp Krusha near Obilič. There were about 2,500 families from all over Kosovo there. That was my first time in a refugee camp and at first it was a place to play for me. I didn't know that we would be in camps for 4 years without hope for a future not knowing what will happen tomorrow. Every day we would wake up and not know where to go or what to do and we would see how other children go to school and their parents go to work. But we were surrounded by wire and police so we could not do those things. What were we being punished for? What was our mistake? Why can't we be happy and free like everyone else all over the world?

Anyway, I will continue to describe my life in camp Krusha. Our first day was good and the refugees that were already there helped us to register as refugees. Some internationals took care of us as well and we received a tent for 7 people. That was not enough space but we had no choice. The second day was more difficult. I couldn't get used to the new people and new environment and new way of living. The hardest thing for me it was seeing that we were surrounded by wires and outside were Albanians. We didn't have freedom, but I started playing to other children to try and forget the past. Life continued and our parents started night shifts to guard our tents from the Albanians in case something happened. We lived like this for two months. One night all the refugees had a meeting where we decided to march to Macedonia, even though it would be dangerous along the way. When I heard the plan I thought, oh God, how will all the old people, children, women with newborn babies make it, but the decision was made. That night people started to get ready for the long journey by preparing the basics – food, some clothes, medical supplies, water. No one could sleep because we didn't know what would happen on the journey. Deep in my soul I felt panicked and restless but I didn't want to worry my parents. The next day when I woke up I saw people organizing. We went together in a group of 460 people. Before leaving, many started to cry and some had to separate from their close families. I was in a panic when I saw sick people, invalids and newborns. I didn't know how we would reach Macedonia, but my wish for freedom was more powerful than anything else. After we left, KFOR told us to go back, but we were strong and continued. After 2km, there was a clash with Albanians and some people were injured but KFOR intervened so no one was killed. I was so scared so I stayed close to my father. After KFOR agreed to escort us I felt more secure. We continued walking to Macedonia and every Albanian car that passed us yelled bad words and threatening things. We didn't care so much and decided to move on to our destination. A lot of women had to throw away their bags because they were too heavy to carry. After 5km some UNHCR staff told us to go back to the camp, but we moved on. When we passed by Priština I saw bombed houses and dead soldiers and I thought, "who will take responsibility for them?" When we reached the bus station some Albanians came out from nowhere and I thought they would attack us and stop us, but KFOR protected us and we managed to continue. UNHCR staff asked us to come back again, but we rejected their offer so they decided to help us by promising buses to take us to the border. We spent one night at a gas station with KFOR patrolling all night long. UNHCR brought us

blankets and some food. We were so tired from the trip from the camp to the gas station. Neither I nor my parents could sleep that night – we were wondering about the next day. We hoped that one day our pains would stop and we could have a good life and the same rights as everybody else all over the world.

I was happy when I saw 5 buses come around 8pm because I thought our problems were over. All the way to Macedonia I kept wondering whether Macedonia will accept us and how long we would have to wait at the border. When we were 7km from the border, they told us to get out and walk but we saw Albanians coming and threatening us. I was very afraid to get out. Eventually the bus drivers agreed to take us further. We only had to walk a little bit to the border. We had the hope that it would be open and we could just go in. I hoped I would have a normal life and be happy and start a new life and happy days.

August 16th interview with Osmi - the story of his kidnapping

“This happened in 1998 a few months before the war started. This was the time when the Serbs and Albanians started to hate each other and be violent and the Albanians were starting problems where we lived.”

“At the time I lived in the village of Vršovice, Kosovo and would commute to work in the power plant of Kosovo Polje. After work I would usually go home. On this day I went to my sister Mimoza’s and spent the night. The next day I set off to go home to Vršovice. Mimoza lived in a village with many Albanians and in 1998 they started to protest and make trouble for the Serbs and Roma. I only thought of going home that day and I took a bus to Kosovo Polje, but the bus went the wrong way. The bus went towards a known UÇK (the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army) soldier hangout. I asked the driver to stop and told him that this was not my direction, but he said no. He told me we will make a small detour and then return the right way. After about 100 meters I saw UÇK Albanians. I started to panic; I was so scared. And I was confused. Shortly after, the bus arrived in a place with over 200 UÇK. The driver told me to ask one soldier for directions but I was scared so I sat outside one store to think and assess the situation. One soldier came and asked me for identification. When I showed it to him he put me in handcuffs and then put me in a car. I was shoved on the floor of the backseat. I didn’t know where they were taking me. The car kept going and I heard rivers but I couldn’t see where we were. There were two other men in the car. They took me to a small store and covered by eyes. Before I was blindfolded I saw different kinds of weapons and computers inside. They put me down on the floor and starting stomping on me with boots and pistol-whipping me on my chest, stomach and all over my body. They asked me ‘why the hell did you come here!?’ and ‘why the hell did you wave to that Serb guy!?’ and ‘are you on the side of the Serbs, Gypsy?!’ and then they continued beating me. There were four at first then two more came with weapons. I scared and confused and I didn’t know what they were going to do. I was badly injured. Then they tore my ID. When I realized they tore my ID I knew I would be murdered. I kept asking ‘what did I do?’ but they didn’t believe or care I was innocent. Later came an officer to told me to reveal the spies in my village. I told him I didn’t know any. Then they beat me again and told me to answer or they would feed me to snakes. I was sure I would be killed. I even told them it would be better to kill me that hurt me more. At last two more UÇK came and put me in handcuffs, a mask, and put me in the trunk of my car. I thought they

were taking me to kill me elsewhere. I was scared I would never see my family again. When the trunk was opened I saw we were in a forest. The two men who brought me had weapons. They took off my blindfold and handcuffs. I still thought I was going to die. Then one told me 'you didn't see or hear anything. Just leave.' I was scared if I ran away they would shoot me in the back. When I start to walk they followed me slowly in the car. I kept trying to walk but I was very injured. I finally arrived at a bridge and washed my face but I was scared to go one because I had to pass Serb checkpoints and I didn't have my documents anymore. I think I passed out and my sister or someone found me. I don't remember this part. I remember later my sister was shocked to see me so hurt. I stayed five days with my sister to recuperate. She nursed me all the time. On the fifth day I went back to Kosovo Polje. All my family was there. They were worried because they hadn't seen me in five days. They were afraid I had been killed. My brothers were searching everywhere. When Osman saw me with Mimoza and her husband he started yelling 'Where the hell were you?! What happened?!' I told him the story."

"After this I was scared to leave my house until we fled to Macedonia in the war as refugees. One terrible thing now is that I feel I can't trust Albanians. Nowadays my big fear is that after independence the Macedonian government and UNHCR will deport us to Kosovo. I will die if that happens. The UÇK will remember me. Before it didn't matter so much if the Albanians killed me but now I'm a family man. I must be there for my wife and children. This is why I can never go back to Kosovo."

A few months later Osmi's brother Osman found the men that did this. "I was in a shop and ran into some of my and Osmi's schoolmates. They mistook me for Osmi because we look something alike. They made some reference that made me realize it was them. Those men knew who they were beating and they knew it was their schoolmate. In our family no one hates, not Albanian, not Serb, but this was too much for us."

Osmi had reservations about making his story more publicly known ("what if Albanians hear it?") because "now I am married with children so it is very important for me to be safe now." Towards the end of my stay in Šutka however, Osmi ultimately decided to speak to me about his kidnapping so I could better understand their situation, although his story is not related to education. Also, he wanted me to write something that someone in a position to help might see. He said it was difficult to talk about but that he wanted to tell me his story because something similar once happened to a friend. The friend told his story to an international, and he got help getting asylum in another country. Osmi asked me to tell the story so that maybe people would understand the situation and help him get his family to a safe place. Lastly, I think it was a cathartic experience; he wanted to tell the story although it was painful. He certainly looked pained when telling me this story, as if he was living the trauma all over again.